A Case Study of the Experience of International Schools with the ACE Accreditation Protocol Through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Raccio, Kim

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Kim Mary Raccio

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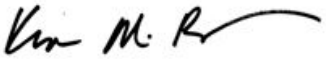
Candidate's Signature 

Declaration of authorship

I am the author of this thesis, and the work described therein was carried out by myself personally.

Candidate's Signature 

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ABSTRACT

A Case Study of the Experience of International Schools with the ACE Accreditation Protocol Through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges

In 2016, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on International Education (NEASC/CIE), introduced a major modification to its long-established school accreditation process. This new protocol, called ACE (Architecture, Culture, Ecology), aimed "to transform rather than 'improve' schools and reshapes accreditation into an instrument to enable systemic change" (NEASC/CIE 2016).

Through the introduction of ACE, NEASC/CIS hoped to initiate a paradigm shift in both the expectations of and outcomes for school accreditation. This study explored NEASC/CIE's claims for ACE by focusing on the experience of schools involved in ACE accreditation and specifically inquiring how the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools and to what degree school leadership perceived ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within participant schools.

Seven schools participated in a mixed-methods case study involving the analysis of learning principle reports produced by the schools as part of the ACE protocol, along with direct interviews with school administrators. Analysis of report and interview data indicated that, while participating schools utilized language that aligned with NEASC/CIE's conceptualization of transformative learning impacts less frequently than more traditional language, school administrators reported multiple ways in which the ACE protocol positively impacted the overall school community.

Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that schools valued accreditation by NEASC/CIE, the ACE protocol facilitated whole-school collaboration, and dialogue generated during the ACE self-study was frequently focused on the impact of learning on students. That said, this study also concluded that greater supports may be necessary to help schools navigate the ACE protocol and truly implement transformational learning shifts within their communities. Given that the ACE protocol was in its infancy at the time of this study, numerous opportunities for further study exist that may include, but should not be limited to, the exploration of the lived experience of the various stakeholders participating in the ACE protocol, comparative studies between ACE and other accreditation models, or longitudinal studies of exploring the impact of ACE within learning communities over time.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Nearly four decades ago, United States Secretary of Education Terrell Howard Bell established the Commission on Excellence in Education to review and report on the state of the American educational system. The Commission chaired by David Gardner (1983) published *A Nation at Risk*: *The Imperative for Educational Reform* and proclaimed dramatically that the "educational foundations of our [American] society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p. 1). Despite the report's emphasis on the acquisition of credits and standardized testing, the document directly addressed the need for increased academic readiness necessary for success in university and the American workforce.

A Nation at Risk helped to usher in an era of conversations regarding curricular and academic policy changes within the United States. These conversations influenced not only the teachers and principals responsible for the development and delivery of curriculum at the level of individual schools, but also the accreditation organizations historically responsible for the oversight of the many schools that fell under their regional purview.

A Nation at Risk was certainly not alone in catalyzing American accreditation agencies to consider how best to support schools in their drive towards the educational excellence necessary to turn the tide on diminishing educational attainments. Other comparative international educational assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 1997 (OECD 2005) and the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1995 (TIMSS & PIRLS 2016) expanded the dialogue and introduced the language of *21st Century Skills* into the educational lexicon. Educational policy makers of the 1990's cited the development of these skills as crucial for American students to catch up to the academic achievements of students in higher achieving countries and remain competitive in a globalized workforce (Wallis & Steptoe 2006).

While some have argued that the emergence of 21st century skills as a concept did not introduce any new educational insights, and in fact philosophers such as Aristotle identified these skills as critical to academic training as early as 360 BCE (Rose 2009), organizations such as the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21 2018) flourished and published their *Framework for 21st Century Learning.* This framework promoted the following skills as necessary for success in the modern world:

Knowledge and 21st Century Themes

Students should obtain a mastery of fundamental subjects including English, reading or language arts, World languages, Arts, Mathematics, Economics, Science, Geography, History, Government and Civics, Global awareness, Financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy, Civic literacy, Health literacy, Environmental literacy

Learning and Innovation Skills

The curriculum should provide opportunities for students to express creativity and innovation, employ critical thinking and problem solving, communicate and collaborate.

Information, Media and Technology Skills

Students should develop information literacy, media literacy, and ICT literacy

Life and Career Skills

Students should have the opportunity to build life and career skills that emphasize and practice flexibility and adaptability, leadership and responsibility, productivity and accountability, initiation and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills (P21 2018).

As individual institutions and school districts worked over the past decades to implement learning programs to address the deficits in these 21st century skills, organizations responsible for the accreditation of schools concurrently adapted their protocols in response to the shifting educational landscape. Although a comprehensive review of the evolution of contemporary school accreditation within the United States is not the purview of the study, a cursory glance at the language used in the standards of current accreditation guides (ACCJC/WASC 2012, Gallo & Woodward 2010, AdvancEd 2018) for some of the major accreditation agencies in the United States reflects the P21 skills listed above.

Despite the efforts that U.S. accreditation agencies have made to drive and support schools in the implementation of comprehensive curricula equipping students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for success in this century, additional factors, such as the U.S. *No Child Left Behind* legislation of 2002 (PBS 2002), and more recently the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* of 2015 (U.S. Department of Education 2017), simultaneously ushered in an era of accountability that arguably challenged the ability of American schools and accreditation

agencies to transcend a content-driven educational program. Now, thirty-five years after the call to action presented in *A Nation at Risk*, academic scholars continue to clamor for the design of "a 'new education' that encourages students not just to cram for reductive tests but to succeed in the harrowing world we have bequeathed to them" (Davidson 2018 p. 1). Organizations such as P21, as well as numerous additional groups such as Modern Learners (2018), the Alliance for Excellent Education (2018), and the Global Digital Citizen Foundation continue to serve as think tanks for supporting schools in the development of curricula necessary for 21st century success (2018).

In agreement with academic scholars such as Davidson (2018) and heavily influenced by Modern Learners, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), a historically significant U.S. accreditation agency in terms of both scope of work and breadth of member schools, recently engaged in an extensive reformation of its accreditation procedures within its Commission on International Education (CIE) with the goal of driving meaningful school change for the 21st century. Believing that it holds a unique role navigating the intersection of educational quality control and innovation, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on International Education (NEASC/CIE) unveiled a "transformative" accreditation protocol in 2016 known as ACE. In NEASC/CIE's own words, the protocol "aims to transform rather than 'improve' schools and reshapes accreditation into an instrument to enable systemic change" (NEASC/CIE 2016, p. 1). The first school-based pilot of ACE was conducted in early 2017 and 59 schools queued to run the protocol in the 2017-2018 academic year. This study takes advantage of the unique opportunity to observe and investigate the leading edge of a new educational movement launched by one of America's most established voices in education.

All of the schools impacted by the ACE protocol currently fall within the membership of NEASC/CIE and generally are located outside of the continental United States. Historically, these schools were considered 'American Schools Abroad' and, as such, accreditation of these schools was heavily influenced by U.S. educational policy such as that emphasized in *A Nation at Risk*. Today, NEASC/CIE is uniquely positioned to shape its current and future policies and procedures by both the historical American educational narrative as well as emerging trends in American and international educational practice. NEASC/CIE member schools are located around the world and are comprised of American, host-nation, and international students.

1.2 Significance of the study

The process of and goals for American school accreditation are well-documented in the academic literature (Murphy 2001, Fertig 2015, Fertig 2007, Raccio 2012) and through publications by various accreditation organizations (ACCJC/WASC 2012, NEASCb 2018). For decades in the United States, the purpose of accreditation, predominantly, had been twofold: (1) to encourage a school in success and continuous improvement against its organizational mission and vision and (2) to provide a public assurance of quality against a set of standards (Selden & Porter 1979, Bogue & Saunders 1992, Coffey & Millsaps 2004, Bradley 2018). The duality of accreditation is particularly salient for NEASC/CIE member schools outside of the continental United States. Because their frequently transient student populations may later repatriate to secondary schools and universities within the United States, U.S. accreditation may provide a level of acceptance for educational credentials to ease that transition (Coffey & Millsaps 2004, Raccio 2010).

The implementation of ACE marks a meaningful shift in both the purpose and the process of accreditation via NEASC/CIE. For NEASC/CIE member schools, or those currently seeking affiliation with NEASC/CIE, this organizational paradigm shift may impact decisions regarding accreditation within their schools, lending urgency to gaining a deeper understanding of the ACE process.

Another significant reason for this study is to evaluate ACE's claim of accreditation as a transformational process. Many articles identify accreditation as an important process for maintaining school quality, yet the literature also raises concerns regarding accreditation as a process that focuses on obtaining the 'minimum standards' (Harvey & Newton 2004), suggests US-based accreditation as burdensome to schools (Kanter & Soo 2013), and/or questions the role of accreditation in maintaining an academic status quo, particularly in this era of testing accountability (McKenzie & Kress 2015). Research by Fertig (2015) on the impact of school authorization cycles in international schools indicated that, "essentially, the re-accreditation process follows the same pattern as the original process, and rarely involves 'raising the bar' for institutions" (p. 10), despite the claims from accreditation bodies as promoting institutional improvement.

ACE's concept of transformative accreditation presents a bold new perspective on the role this process may hold for driving changes in teaching and learning and is one in which there is limited research available. This study will explore the degree to which the accreditation process can impact the transformation of learning towards 21st century goals within a school. As such,

the data and conclusions of this study will contribute a new perspective on this area of academic discourse.

There are no empirical studies of ACE's efficacy in moving participating schools along a "transformational learning continuum" (NEASC/CIE 2016, p. 1). The purpose of this study is to gather baseline data regarding the implementation and impact of accreditation by ACE. This will be done by examining the language used in ACE reports prepared by schools participating in the ACE protocol as well as direct interviews with schools and ACE designers. This case study approach will allow data to be gathered regarding the degree to which the ACE process supports schools in transforming to 21st century learning communities.

1.3 Understanding NEASC

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, or NEASC, "is an independent, voluntary, nonprofit membership organization which connects and serves over 1500 public, independent, and international schools in the US and worldwide. Founded in 1885, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) has been working to establish and maintain high standards for all levels of education longer than any other accreditation agency in the United States. NEASC is made up of three Commissions which work in close partnership to ensure quality education for all students" (NEASCc 2018). The three comissions include the Comission on International Education (CIE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), and the Commission on Public Schools (CPS). In late 2018, NEASC completed a corporate restructuring required by the U.S. Department of Education resulting in the formation of the New England Commission of Higher Education, Inc. (NECHE), which oversees New England's colleges and universities (NEASCe 2019). Due to the long history of oversight of higher education by NEASC, NECHE maintains close connections to NEASC as it remains an independent organization. Figure 1 depicts the relationships of the three commissions and NECHE, including an overview of the types of institutions serviced by each commission, within the greater NEASC organizational structure:

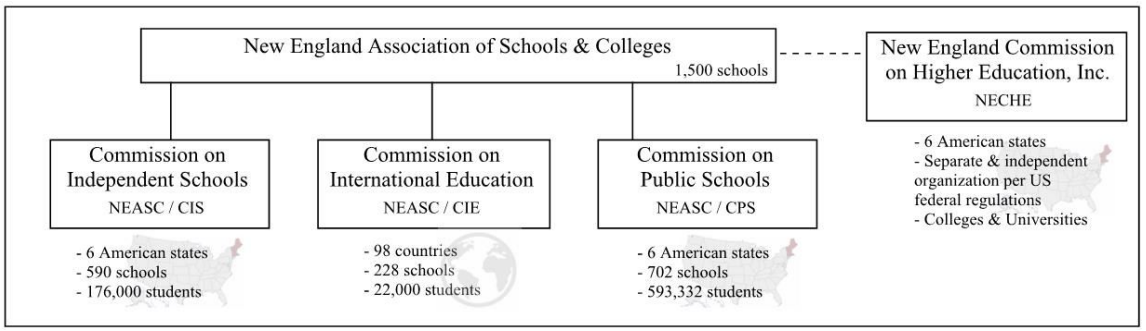

Figure 1: Overview of NEASC Organizational Structure

NEASC is one of the six major regional accreditation bodies in the United States providing oversight for the educational institutions falling within their geographic purview. Other U.S. regional accreditation organizations and their geographical areas of oversight are depicted in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Regional US Accrediting Agencies (Drexel 2019)

1.4 Accreditation in an American Context

Significantly influenced by the relationship between federal (national) and state (local) branches of government, the term 'accreditation' in the United States has a unique definition in the American education system. While a more detailed overview of the evolution of U.S. educational accountability systems resulting in America's current accreditation system can be found in Appendix I, an understanding of this term in an American context is necessary for this study. A

brief, but useful, summary of the relationship between regional, non-governmental accreditation agencies and the government is provided by the U.S. Department of Education:

> "...although the U.S. Department of Education (Department) has an important role to play in ensuring that all academically-ready students have the opportunity to attend the colleges of their choice, Congress has prohibited the Department from intervening in the curricular decisions of an institution and attempting to exert control over its faculty, administration, and academic programs. The Department of Education Organization Act affirms that:
>
> > **No provision of a program administered by the Secretary or by any other officer of the Department shall be construed to authorize the Secretary or any such officer to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or school system**.
>
> Instead, Congress has assigned the role of overseeing the quality and academic sufficiency of instructional programs to accrediting agencies (accreditors). Accreditors are independent, membership-based organizations that rely on peer review to ensure that member institutions meet certain standards for academic quality and rigor. The aim of accreditation is not to ensure that all institutions accredited by a given agency are identical or that all students who attend those institutions reach for the same goals or achieve the same outcomes. Instead, accreditors ensure that students have access to qualified instructors, an adequate curriculum, and necessary support services to enable them to meet their personal, academic, intellectual, and career goals...Accreditation is a voluntary process [and] accreditors are one important part of the regulatory triad that oversees ... education quality [including state authorization agencies and the Department of Education]" (U.S. Department of Education 2018).

A more detailed explanation of how accreditation agencies works in conjunction with other organizations providing oversight to U.S. educational organizations is found in chapter two. chapter two also considers how accreditation aligns with other frequently used educational terms such as evaluation and accountability.

1.5 Scope of NEASC/CIE Influence

Although the majority of NEASC/CIE member schools are located outside of continental U.S., that should not diminish the potential impact of research on ACE as influential for either (1) the substantial number of students and staff enrolled in these schools or (2) the contributions of this protocol on the overall American accreditation conversation. As the oldest educational accreditation agency in the United States, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges maintains substantial influence on the American educational landscape. Their website (NEASCc 2018) notes that NEASC is one of only six national accreditation agencies in the U.S. recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit schools across all levels of education and currently supports more than 1,500 schools in the U.S. and worldwide. In addition to accrediting schools directly via their three commissions, NEASC is involved in numerous research efforts and participates regularly in public policy work at both local and national levels. Due to these factors, NEASC is well-positioned to influence the development of U.S. accreditation services.

The research and development of ACE was conducted by NEASC's Commission on International Education (CIE). With 228 schools on their roster at the time of this study (NEASCd 2018) serving 22,000 students as well as an additional 55 candidate schools currently eligible for and finalizing their membership, NEASC/CIE is responsible for approximately one-fifth of NEASC's overall accreditation membership. An additional 99 schools have inquired about candidacy as of September 2018. The leadership and staff of each commission meets regularly to share research and align on best practices that shape the accreditation process and procedures across all three commissions. As such, research on ACE holds the potential to directly or indirectly influence the educational experience of the more than 1,500 schools supported by NEASC.

ACE also holds the potential to directly impact the lived experience of a significant number of students and teachers, further justifying the rationale for research in this area. For comparison, consider the total number of schools and students served by NEASC/CIE member schools in light of general U.S. public school demographics. Specifically, the 283 member and candidate schools with NEASC/CIE is greater than or roughly equivalent to the total number of public schools present in the following U.S. states:

State	Number of Public Schools Serving Grades K-12
Vermont	90
Hawaii	105
Delaware	165
Alaska	195
Rhode Island	255
Nevada	285

Table 1: Approximate Number of K-12 Public Schools and Students Served by State (IES>NCES. 2018)

At the start of this study, approximately 23 percent of NEASC/CIE member schools were engaged in the ACE protocol, offering the potential for meaningful data collection for this new accreditation model.

1.6 The goal and research questions of the study

The goal of the study is to determine the degree to which NEASC/CIE's ACE accreditation process affects NEASC/CIE member schools in the creation of transformative learning environments. The research questions for this study aim to understand the influence of the new ACE accreditation protocol upon schools undertaking the accreditation process via ACE. The significant questions for this study were:

1. What is the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools who have undertaken ACE accreditation protocol?
2. How has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?
3. To what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?

Practically, the data generated and analysed in this study may serve useful for a variety of stakeholders, including, but not limited to:

- *International Schools*: Particularly for international schools located outside of the continental U.S. who regularly enroll U.S. citizens or students who may seek future educational opportunities in the United States, data from this study may provide international schools with valuable information to guide policy decisions regarding the accreditation process within their organizations. Given the pragmatic, and arguably political, nature of school accreditation as a validation of educational quality,

international schools, including current NEASC/CIE member schools, must grapple with questions regarding their future under ACE. Whether an organization elects to embrace or reject the protocol offered by any American accreditation agency is of significance to that community. Data from this study may provide support for decisions made at this local level.

- *NEASC*:
    - *Holistic Organizational Impact:* According to their websites (NEASCb. 2018), the three commissions under NEASC's umbrella jointly conduct regular reviews of their accreditation processes. This study may provide useful data on this new endeavor which can be considered during the review and revision of accreditation goals and procedures for the Commission on Independent Schools and the Commission on Public Schools, potentially impacting more than 1,500 schools located in the New England region.
    - *NEASC/CIE*: With eight editions of the previous accreditation protocol dating back to the 1970s, NEASC/CIE has demonstrated a history of reflective internal review of its policies and protocols. The data from this study may aid in the revisions of the ACE as NEASC/CIE continues to evolve this protocol which in turn may directly impact the 283 member and candidate schools on their current roster.
- *New England Public and Independent Schools*: As a result of the wide-reaching influence NEASC maintains on K-12 institutions of learning in five states, any influence of ACE on accreditation protocols for the other NEASC commissions has significant potential reach.
- *Wider Educational Community*: Both academics and practitioners are concerned with the analysis of emerging trends in education. Unlike previous American accreditation methods, the ACE protocol does not claim to be agnostic; rather, it clearly attempts to delineate what practices must occur within schools in order to deliver a transformative educational experience for learners, directly addressing the developmental gaps highlighted in *A Nation at Risk*. As such, data regarding the efficacy of this new approach to accreditation will yield an original contribution to the research in this area. The results of this study may support a wider understanding of the applications for educational program development and the role accreditation may serve to forward that objective.

1.7 Thesis structure

The major elements of this study are organized into the following sequence: overview of educational feedback systems as well as a review of literature pertaining to American educational reform and school accountability as it relates to American accreditation, historical development of and guiding theory for the ACE protocol, methodology, protection of data and human participants, limitations of the study, data presentation, analysis of data and conclusions against the research questions, implementations and recommendations for further study, reference list and supporting appendices.

The thesis begins with clarification of educational terminology and a consideration of educational feedback systems as influential elements in the development of the American accreditation process. Drawing from the perspectives of multiple scholars, this framework provides a lens through which the degree of programmatic efficacy in light of a particular context may be considered. Following from this overview, the literature review addresses both the historical development of American educational reforms and the evolution of adherent accountability systems that directly influenced the emergence of the American accreditation process, including a consideration of studies specifically exploring NEASC accreditation. This more general discussion of educational reform segues into a detailed summary of the development and structure of the research focal area, the ACE protocol, before moving into the research methodology. The methodology chapter contains details regarding the design of the case study, clarifies the textual analysis process for reports provided by NEASC/CIE member schools, as well as the process for conducting interviews with school administrators experiencing the ACE protocol in situ. This chapter also contains details regarding the participants, data collection methods and the ethical considerations for protection of data and participants in accordance with the British Educational Research Association, and a critique on the limitations of the study. The final chapters of this thesis include the presentation of the data, analysis of the data, subsequent conclusions drawn from internal and external research, and concludes with considerations for future research.

Chapter Two:
Overarching Issues

This chapter builds off of the early definition of accreditation provided in chapter one by defining key terms that are frequently used when discussing school accountability. These terms may be used alongside, or mistakenly substituted for, accreditation. These terms describe processes which may provide schools with feedback for growth, systems of measurement, or in some cases, both. These definitions are followed by a consideration of the difference between feedback and measurement and how that has influenced and/or problematized the American accreditation process. Accreditation critiques provided by Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder (2008), grounded in the tension between feedback and measurement, are introduced as the theoretical frame for this study. It should be noted that only an introduction, rather than a comprehensive review of Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder 's work, is provided in chapter two. Additional elements of Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder's critique appear throughout chapter six in direct response to the data itself. The chapter concludes with an overview of previous studies of NEASC accreditation and the importance and role of leadership in facilitating educational change.

2.1 Overview of Key Terminology

A number of frequently utilized and overlapping terms are employed by researchers and practitioners when discussing school accountability measures. That said, while educational lexicon may reference similar words, definitions or commonly held understandings of these terms may vary. Chapter two begins with a summary of the varied understandings that exist regarding key terminology relevant to the study. Finally, clarification of these terms as they are examined through the research lens of ACE is provided. The specific terms considered here include educational *accountability, authorization, evaluation, and inspection.*

Accountability

Across most sectors - business, government, education, etc., "accountability" is generally understood as holding the actions of individuals or organizations as responsible for specific, measurable outcomes (Merriam-Webster 2018). In schools, accountability systems hold the actions of teachers and school administrators as responsible for the results of student performance against a variety of measures (Bae, 2018). Accountability measures that are defined by and monitored within an organization are thought of as internal whereas measures defined by an entity residing outside of the organization, such as a local government, and requiring the organization to report results against those measures would be considered external (Kinser &

Lane 2017). The purpose of identifying specific criteria for measurement and the subsequent reporting of results is generally for evaluative purposes - to determine the degree to which an individual or organization is achieving against a goal. While the data generated via accountability reports can vary widely, there is a general tendency in US education towards rewarding individuals or organizations for the achievement of desired outcomes or providing punishment due to a lack of positive results (EdWeek, 2004).

In his book, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Patrick Lencioni (2002) argues that "accountability is a buzzword that has lost much of its meaning as it has become as overused as terms like *empowerment* and *quality*" (p. 212). The power of accountability, according to Lencioni, is in "the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors" (p. 212) that directly impact the team in positive and/or negative ways with the belief that "the most effective and efficient means of maintaining high standards of performance on a team is peer pressure" (p. 213). He continues on to note that "one of the benefits is the reduction of the need for excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action. More than any policy or system, there is nothing like fear of letting down respected teammates that motivates people to improve their performance" (p. 213). A similar sentiment is echoed by Rothstein et al. in the context of education when he states that "pressure to meet professional peers' expectations spurs genuine reform in American schools today" (p.130). From this perspective, Lencioni and Rothstein et al. promote internal accountability as a powerful force for improvement, despite what additional external accountability measures may be imposed upon an organization or their teams.

Although this study aligns with Merriam-Webster's definition of "accountability" as identifying a locus of responsibility for performance outcomes, the lens with which one views the term must also be considered. The differing perspectives and conflicting underlying values associated with *internal* versus *external* accountability introduce a significant challenge when discussing accountability. The impact of such conflicting viewpoints was presented earlier in this chapter and the impact of these perspectives on the ACE protocol will be further explored throughout this paper.

Authorization

The awarding of accreditation may indicate that a school holds to a sufficient standard of internal and externally benchmarked quality, yet even so, such a status may or may not prove sufficient for a school to remain open and servicing students in the United States. Though the terms

accreditation and authorization are frequently used in interchangable ways, some important distinctions for school authorization must be highlighted here. Authorization is the formal process by which a school is approved to become or remain open. New schools must obtain permission to open from an authorization agency and schools may also be closed by such agencies. In the U.S., state laws determine authorization providers, which may include, but are not limited to local school districts, state boards of education, universities, non-profit organizations, independent charter boards and municipal governments (Shen 2011). Authorization agencies may leverage the outcome of the accreditation process in determining the standing of a school, yet the functions are distinctly different (Eaton 2015, Kinser & Lane 2017). For example, in Connecticut, "neither state nor federal law mandates that schools be accredited by NEASC or any other accrediting agency. State law does require that the board of education for any public school that is NEASC-accredited disclose the accreditation reports to the public" (DeBoer 2012, p. 1). Schools in other states, such as many charter schools in New York, are not subjected to an accreditation process, rather they are regularly reviewed by organizations such as the Charter Schools Institute (CSI). Reviews conducted by the CSI maintain many similarities to the accreditation process provided by NEASC, including the production reports that recommend renewal of charters to authorizer, in this case, the State University of New York (SUNY 2018).

Although schools may obtain licenses and/or continue to operate without maintaining accreditation status, it is important to note that students enrolled in such schools may encounter unforeseen difficulties. For example, because U.S. universities assume that accreditation from NEASC reflects an appropriate level of educational provision necessary for secondary-school graduates to achieve success at university, students applying for admission from a non-accredited school may have their educational achievements questioned. Connecticut State Department of Education officials noted that the "loss of accreditation would create difficulties for students applying to higher education institutions, since admission offices consider whether an applicant's high school is accredited when deciding which candidates to accept. Some colleges require graduation from an accredited high school" (DeBoer 2012, p. 1). To that end, authorization agents may place high value on the outcome of accreditation recommendations, which in turn translate to individual schools placing high value on maintaining accreditation status. This relationship is important to bear in mind in the context of this study as it may or may not problematize the goals of accreditation for both schools and authorization agencies.

Evaluation

In his research on school self-evaluation, Jaap Scheerens (2002) defines evaluation as "judging

the value of an object, and evaluation in the sense of a particular type of disciplined inquiry emphasizes that this 'judging' and 'valuing' is based on some kind of systematic information gathering approach" (p. 39). To make such judgements, or to place such value upon the focal object of an evaluation, results from a process of collecting and analyzing facts that can be compared against a greater body of data. In the context of education, evaluations generally involve the review of multiple criteria in order to provide a statement of quality, or quality profile that can help to drive future school or programmatic improvements (Nevo 2002). Of course, as Stake (1967) notes, "the purposes and procedures of educational evaluation will vary from instance to instance" (p. 2), but like Scheerens, Stake describes the process of evaluation as both descriptive and judgemental - and the perspectives of the individual evaluators cannot be disentangled from the process of evaluation. Within schools, these perspectives can drive two common formats - informal and formal - whereby informal evaluations are used in a formative way to promote continuous incremental growth and formal evaluations provide a summative quality statement which may also be used for growth. Evaluations may also be internal or external. When considering the role of the external evaluator in schools, scholars caution the inexperience and lack of specialized training in evaluation that is frequently found in individuals conducting evaluations, particularly in an "accreditation-type visitation team" (Stake 1967, p. 1). These concerns may be particularly salient in this study where the ACE protocol is new and training or experience for individuals engaged in this process may be quite limited.

Inspection

Whereas the terms *evaluation, authorization* and *accountability* frequent discussions regarding American education, *inspection* is not nearly so commonly utilized in the United States as it is in other countries (Ladd 2016). Given that the majority of schools accredited by NEASC/CIE are located outside of the continental U.S., a brief consideration of this term is warranted.

A working paper produced by UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning for a publication series on trends in school supervision summarizes inspection as the following:

> Inspection, a process of assessing the quality and/or performance of schools by external agents, is a near-world wide educational practice. In recent years many countries have re-examined their inspection systems in the face of demands that their schools should be made more transparently accountable for the outcomes and standards which they achieve. Inspection, however, is never only an instrument of accountability - it has always assumed, as a potential consequence the improvement of the institution inspected

(Wilcox 2000, p. 10).

In many countries, but specifically in the English system, external inspection agents are professionally trained and contracted to work with a governmental agency responsible for educational oversight (Rothstein et al. 2008). Participation in the inspection process is required for schools, may be conducted with or without advanced notice to a school and inspection reports are published and schools found to be inadequate may be required to undergo significant alterations to their governance via rebrokering (Ofsted 2018).

2.2 Feedback and Measurement

The first part of chapter two considered various lenses by which schools may examined (*accountability, authorization, evaluation, and inspection*). An exploration of these terms is necessary to clarify an understanding of another frequently utilized educational term, *accreditation*, as it relates to this study. That said, it is important to note that all systems discussed so far rely heavily on the process of gathering feedback from and transmitting feedback to schools. Wheatley and Rogers would argue that this is unsurprising as "all life thrives on feedback and dies without it" (2007, p. 9). As such, developing a deeper understanding of the role of feedback and measurement systems is warranted and will be explored in this section of chapter two.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) define feedback "as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (p. 81). Of course, feedback or feedback cycles are not a uniquely educational, or indeed human, construct. Whether maintaining appropriate insulin levels in the human body, comfortable temperatures in a thermostat-regulated home or helping a young teacher develop better classroom management skills, feedback cycles play such an essential and ubiquitous role in dynamic systems that the term "feedback", as we know it, was not conceptualized in the English language until the early 1900's (OED 2019). Feedback holds a particularly unique place in American school accreditation, and to that end, it is worth considering the types of feedback commonly encountered in schools for the purpose of later contextualizing this information in light of accreditation.

Schools - in the case of this study primary and secondary schools- are highly complex, dynamic communities subject to extensive sources of feedback both internal and external to the community. Insofar as this feedback offers a rich source of information to guide the ongoing

development of a school, the breadth and complexity of available feedback risks conceptually overwhelming the school system, possibly resulting in ineffective, disjointed or incomplete action by the school. To address this issue, school performance feedback systems ("SPFSs") developed to assist in streamlining and structuring feedback at all levels within educational organizations, and concurrently, numerous studies (Visscher & Coe 2003, Verhaeghe et al. 2015, Schildkamp & Archer 2017) have emerged exploring the characteristics and efficacy of SPFSs. Some scholars and many school principals, superintendents, etc., hold that SPFSs attempt to delineate and quantify relevant data for the purpose of driving school improvement, positive accountability, increased student outcomes and stakeholder empowerment, such as family choice (Visscher & Coe 2105, Schildkamp & Archer 2017). Unfortunately, the proliferation of SPFSs, complete with their robust data sets, is transforming school leaders into managers of data, tasked with "interpreting and manipulating these numerical views of reality" (Wheatley & Rodgers 2007, p. 8). The manipulation of data defines the courses of action and pathways to quality in ways that are impacted by the persuasive effects of various stakeholders (Eason & Thompson 1988) and in subtle, or perhaps not-so-subtle ways, performance *feedback* morphs into performance *measurement*, complete with the associated political implications associated with such measurement (Lauder et al. 2006, Sriprakash 2010). The differences between feedback and measurement are summarized by Wheatley and Rodgers (p.10):

Feedback	*Measurement*
● Context-dependent. ● Self-determined. The systems chooses what to notice. ● Information is accepted from anywhere. ● The system creates its own meaning. ● The focus is on adaptability and growth. ● Meaning evolves. ● The system co-adapts with its environment.	● One size fits all. ● Imposed. Criteria are established externally. ● Information is put in fixed categories. ● Meaning is predetermined. ● Prediction and routine are valued. ● The focus is on stability and control. ● Meaning remains static. ● The system adapts to the measures.

Table 2: Summary of Feedback versus Measurement (Wheatley & Rodgers 2007. p.10)

Feedback is a natural process for a dynamic system such as education, but feedback can be problematized by the context in which schools exist. Being arguably a public good, schools and the feedback or measurement they receive is subjected to the politics of the social arena within which they reside. (Simmons 1987). Simmons further notes that providing feedback as a form of

measurement has developed into a field consisting of widely variant approaches and models. While the standards, criteria or principles utilized to measure education may vary, many scholars will agree that these measurement systems are of a political nature (House 1974, Simmons 1987, Stronge & Tucker 1999, Pizmony-Levy & Woolsey 2017). To that end, a deeper consideration of accreditation and its positioning within the wider American educational accountability system is warranted for the purposes of this paper.

2.3 School Accreditation in the United States

The oversight of educational services is a global phenomenon, however, the U.S. educational system has an uniquely robust and complex history of school accountability measures. One important component, U.S. school accreditation, evolved as a key element within the landscape of American school accountability. An understanding of historical context of U.S. accountability systems may be helpful in informing contemporary educational practices, such as the emergence of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Council on International Education's (NEASC/CIE) ACE protocol. A historical overview of these practices is found in Appendix I.

Today, while the U.S. federal government plays a key role in funding and policy related to the American educational system, which requires the input of particular educational measurements, the oversight of education occurs mainly at the sub-national level (Kinser & Lane 2017). Perhaps due to a general distaste for governmental control, localized school boards consisting of appointed or elected citizens were established as early as 1642 with the charge to hold school administrators responsible for student outcomes in public institutions (Woodward 2012). Unfortunately as Rothstein et al. (2008) note, conflicts of both interest and politics resulted in a frequent failure of school boards to fulfill their role as the gatekeepers of quality assurance and accountability. Instead, school boards across the U.S. frequently spend the majority of their time attending to administrative tasks ranging from accounting issues to facilities procurement, transportation logistics or general legal matters. The shortcomings of school boards to provide the democratic accountability of schools desired by the American population may have served to embed another system, the U.S. accreditation process, into the foundation of the American educational system. Alongside the establishment of formalized school boards, the accreditation process evolved in the late 1800's with the aim of reviewing schools through a lens of quality assurance. These early accreditors were heavily focused on school logistics, including the safety and quality of the physical structures. In present day, the accreditation process has evolved significantly to focus on supporting school improvement.

Accreditation is a term now used by schools globally, yet as this chapter highlights, the concept holds deep roots in the American educational system, and therefore shall be viewed through an American lens for the purpose of this study. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education currently defines accreditation as the "recognition that an institution maintains standards requisite for its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning or to achieve credentials for professional practice" (DAPIP 2018). Such recognition is conferred by various organizations called accreditors or accreditation bodies, who are recognized and accepted by the U.S. government as able to award accreditation status on member schools. In providing such recognition, accreditation bodies serve as a buffering link between individual schools and the government by allowing schools to maintain a level of autonomy while receiving the governmental acceptance and approval necessary for access to federal financial resources (Brittingham 2009).

Accreditation is generally maintained by regional organizations and although nuanced differences may exist between accrediting bodies across the country, three elements of the American accreditation process appear to be fairly consistent:

1. "Accreditation is a nongovernmental, self-regulatory, peer review system.
2. Nearly all of the work is done by volunteers.
3. Accreditation relies on the candor of institutions to assess themselves against a set of standards, viewed in the light of their mission, and identify their strengths and concerns, using the process itself for improvement" (Brittingham 2009, p. 10).

As variance may exist between the philosophical and operational elements within accreditation bodies across the U.S., it is important to note that this study draws from NEASC's standards for accreditation which, as published on their website (NEASCb 2018), states:

> "NEASC accreditation is an ongoing cycle founded in professional partnership and support. It is intended to serve as a framework for schools to meet their own unique goals for student learning while maintaining alignment with research-based *Standards for Accreditation* which ensure a high quality student experience. It also serves to assess the systems in place for ongoing institutional self-reflection, a school's capacity for continuous growth, and its ability to be an effective learning community.
>
> Three phases of the accreditation cycle include (1) Reflection, (2) Review and (3) Renewal. In the reflection phase schools undergo a self-study where, ideally, all

> members of the community participate in a structured analysis, self-assessment, and planning in response to the S*tandards of Accreditation*. This self-reflection is followed by the review phase where a committee of volunteers serving on an Accreditation Visiting Team conduct an on-site assessment of an institution which is informed by the school's Self-Reflection and based on the *Standards for Accreditation.* The visit ends with the production of a Visiting Team Report to help drive the renewal phase of the cycle where school personnel respond to recommendations stated in the Visiting Team Report by designing and implementing short-term and long-range plans for improvement and growth."

Should schools that complete the cycle with NEASC be awarded accreditation status, it can be assumed that the school has demonstrated sufficient levels of self-regulation to ensure current and continued quality educational offerings in comparison to other NEASC members, a recognition that will also be maintained by the federal government. The status conferred to these schools implies a level of both internal and external accountability. Internally, schools have demonstrated a sufficient level of reflection and commitment towards self-improvement to warrant accreditation. Externally, institutions, including the U.S. federal government, deem the *Standards for Accreditation* as sufficient for ensuring a minimal level of educational quality, thereby allowing accredited schools access to federal funding and other resources. This study will focus on the internal elements of accreditation, specifically how the ACE protocol drives reflection and self-improvement as a catalyst for potential internal school transformation. Although aspects of accreditation as defined by external measures are not insignificant, exploration of the elements such as the governmental acceptance of accreditation as noted by Brittingham (2009, p. 10) will not be explored in this study.

2.4 Accreditation Critiques

Despite the federal recognition that is conferred upon U.S. accredited schools, some scholars (Rothstein, Jacobsen & Wilder 2008) argue accreditation is not synonymous with a school accountability system and general embarrassment may be the only significant outcome for a school that loses its standing as an accredited school (p. 124). That said, concerns do exist that academic records, for example, school report cards, transcripts or high school diplomas heralding from non-accredited schools may not be recognized by other secondary or higher educational institutions such as universities (Eaton 2015) - certainly not an insignificant concern for an American high school senior! Additionally, non-accredited schools may lose access to federal funding or other governmental benefits (Eaton 2015). Underlying reasons that factor into a

critique of the accreditation process are summarized by Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder provide an important theoretical frame for this study and include:

- Duality of purpose (p. 127): The accreditation process in the United States is structured to serve two goals, (1) to audit the performance of a school against a set of standards, generally developed by the accreditation agency in the context of the greater educational landscape, and (2) to promote internal reflection and goal setting via a self-study process allowing an accreditation agency to report on the progress of a school against the achievement of self-established goals and offer guidance on the future continued pursuit of these goals (Kinser & Lane 2017, Woodhouse 2012). Woodhouse (2012) further argues that lack of clarity against the definition or understanding of standards across the educational sector is a significant challenge for accreditation. For example, are schools required to meet the threshold of minimum standard level of performance or is the measurement against the standard referring to the norm for student outputs?
- Focus on self-identified continuous improvement: Following from the duality of purpose, internally driven methods for self-reflection and self-identified improvements, despite an attempt to connect such efforts to externally maintained standards, do not fulfill the American desire for democratic accountability against nationally agreed upon norms. Historically, accreditation explores the quality of a school program, rather than student achievement. Students are not examined during an accreditation visit and representations of student progress can be determined in a large degree by school administrators. Of course, many schools may seek excellence, yet it is also possible for schools to achieve accreditation by meeting the minimum performance thresholds. As a result, it is possible that the accreditation process can simply promote a continuation of the status quo rather than the more lofty goal of overall school, and particularly student, improvement.
- Voluntary nature of accreditation: For both the accreditors and the school seeking accreditation, participation in the accreditation process is largely voluntary peer review. For schools completing the self study, administrators may seek out voluntary participation by staff in the completion of the self study, including the identification of focal areas for improvement and theories of action to guide improvement plans which may or may not be research-based or data driven. Volunteers also staff the teams conducting the accreditation visit. These visitors often are peer administrators or teachers who may or may not have had any formalized training in preparation for the visit. As a result, it may be difficult for peer visitors to make objective recommendations for improvement and such recommendations are not required to be followed by the school.
- Fiscal conflicts: Accreditation agencies are financially dependent on the dues exacted

from member schools, thus potentially presenting a conflict of interest for agencies when determining initial or continued membership status.

Although the above paragraphs overview some findings in the literature regarding both the positive attributes of U.S. accreditation as well as some critiques, very few studies explore the direct experience for schools with the accreditation process with NEASC. Two known studies focusing on the direct experience of schools will be reviewed in the following section.

2.5 *Review of Studies on School Experience of NEASC Accreditation*

The goal of this study was to determine the degree to which NEASC/CIE's ACE accreditation process affects NEASC/CIE member schools in the creation of transformative learning environments. Although no known research on ACE was available at the time of this study, a limited number of doctoral studies regarding the experience of schools with NEASC accreditation were available in the literature. This section reviews the methodology and findings of two studies exploring the impact on accreditation via the NEASC Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS) for schools in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. While these studies focus on NEASC accreditation models in the context of a different commission, NEASC/CPSS rather than NEASC/CIE, similarities in the historical development of NEASC accreditation and the overall mission of the organization warrants consideration of these studies in the context of this research on ACE. The purpose of this review is twofold: (1) to augment the scholarly perspectives presented earlier in this chapter, and (2) to inform the development of the research questions for this study and provide an opportunity to consider the findings of this study in light of existing related research.

Study One: Massachusetts High Schools (1986-1991)

Interested in stakeholder perception of the NEASC accreditation process for public high schools in Massachusetts, a study by David Flynn (1997) investigated "the perceptions and attitudes of Massachusetts high school principals, superintendents of schools and school committee members in relation to the impact and value of Massachusetts high school accreditation procedures and reports from 1986 through 1991" (p. 41). The study analyzed 176 surveys returned from stakeholders across 130 schools. The survey design included 52 assertions measured by a four-point Likert scale and eight open-ended questions designed to provide insight against the following six major research questions:

- "What is the perceived value and purpose of NEASC membership?
- What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents toward the accreditation

process?

- What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents toward the accreditation status granted by the NEASC?
- What are the effects of fiscally limiting factors on the respondents' perceptions and attitudes toward the accreditation process?
- What are the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents about the role of the accreditation process in bringing about educational change within the community?
- What is the level of involvement of various sectors of the educational community in the accreditation process?" (p. 62)

Flynn's analysis of stakeholder feedback concluded that "membership in the NEASC is viewed as beneficial not only to the school but also to the school system. There seems, however, to be a sense that beyond the accreditation process itself, there is no identifiable purpose to membership in the NEASC" (p. 85). It appeared that the expectations from stakeholders for the accreditation process, albeit positive, did "not have the total impact on the high school program which people expect it to have at the outset of the process" (p. 87). That said, one of the 52 assertions, "the accreditation process effected positive change in our high school's educational program" (p. 89), is particularly worth considering for the purposes of this study regarding ACE. Data in Flynn's study indicated that there was a "strong positive response and, as well, a clear consistency in the respondents' feelings toward the fact that the [NEASC accreditation] process brought about positive change" (p. 90). Principals in the study noted various reasons for this positive impact including a positive focus on "facility issues, personnel issues, forcing a faculty and the community to look at themselves and their school, a new focus on assessment, improved budget requests, and an opportunity to be ahead of educational reform. A dozen principals also highlighted how the process enabled the faculty to respond as a team during the self study and the follow up processes. Three others saw the process as an excellent change agent because of the involvement of the faculty as a team" (p. 93). School-committee personnel and superintendents also viewed accreditation as a tool for positive change, although some superintendents viewed the process less favorably, noting points such as: "the report listed every gripe and devalued the important things"; "the process takes time away from school improvement work"; "the report missed issues about the administration of the school..." (p. 93). Ultimately, Flynn concluded "there was a strong appreciation of the accreditation process among all groups. Concomitantly, clear differences existed among the groups about the purpose and need for the process" (p. viii).

Study Two: New Hampshire High Schools (1987-1997)

Building off of the work of Flynn, George Cushing (1999) adopted Flynn's methodology to

investigate “how key members of the school community, high school principals, superintendents, and school board members, perceived the impact and value of the NEASC accreditation process, particularly as it effected accountability and improvement in their schools” and in connection with the local “state mandated District Education Improvement Plan (DEIP)” (p. xi-xii). Cushing maintained four of Flynn’s six original research questions in order to compare conclusions between the studies (p. 127). 37 superintendents, 36 principals and 31 school board members participated in the survey from across 57 New Hampshire School districts.

As with Flynn’s study, participants in the Cushing study responded positively to the research question regarding the degree to which accreditation facilitates education change. “There was clear agreement by all groups that the accreditation process brings about educational change. Respondents agreed that the standards used for the accreditation process are the criteria for school improvement, and that the accreditation process improved the education program at their local high schools” (p. 121). Unlike Flynn’s study that concluded “that NEASC membership was perceived as having little value beyond the accreditation process. [Cushing’s] study found that membership in the NEASC is viewed as beneficial to the school, school system, and community” which Cushing attributed to growth in the “consistency of purpose”, outreach and support of schools engaged in the process (p.127). Like the Flynn study, principals in Cushing’s study spoke positively regarding the nature of the accreditation self study to “bring the faculty together to reflect on practices and react to the NEASC standards, as a very important part of the process” (p. 114-115). Finally, it is noteworthy that both principals and superintendents in Cushing’s study ranked NEASC accreditation as highest in response to the question “What is the main vehicle for school reform used in your high school?” (p. 106).

Despite the critiques presented earlier in this chapter, the findings from studies by Flynn (1997) and Cushing (1999) generally concur with Rothstein’s conclusions that “the accreditation process today plays an important role in the self-improvement process of many schools” (p. 130). Accreditation, in its uniquely American way, is woven into the fabric of the U.S. educational system. The degree to which the process can drive school improvement is subject to question - and, according to Rothstein et al., in order to drive meaningful change, accreditation systems must be adapted for accountability purposes, transcending a compliance-based review of school programs and resources, to include alignment against cognitive and behavioral outcomes for students. A process of this nature, facilitated by trained professional accreditors, could prove impactful to affect change in the learning processes within schools. As outlined in the introduction to this study, NEASC/CIE’s development of the ACE protocol seeks to redefine the

expectations for school accreditation in terms of both process and outcomes. The significant research questions for this study seek insight on whether or not the ACE protocol has evolved in ways promoted by Rothstein, et al., that position this new accreditation model as one designed to drive meaningful school change.

2.6 The Importance of Leadership

The studies by Cushing and Flynn focused on the feedback of school leaders: superintendents, principals, school board members, regarding the ability for NEASC accreditation to promote meaningful, if not transformational, change in their schools. Granted these studies focused on the impact of the accreditation process as a tool to change, and did not address the impact of the leaders themselves on school change, yet the influence of leadership may not be able to be disentangled from process of transformation and warrants some consideration here.

Despite the best intentions for accreditation processes to promote change and growth, scholars such as Michael Fullan (2002) argue that "system transformation of the type educators now aspire to cannot be accomplished without first ensuring solid leadership at all levels of the system" (p. 1). As presented in chapter one, organizations such as P21 and Modern Learners clarmor for educational reform to transform schools into environments ready to equip students for the future. Educators can look to educational policy changes, educational 'fads', and in fact accreditation, to provide structures and programs to support educational transformation in schools, yet Fullan (1998) notes that such change cannot take root unless embodied deeply within school leadership:

> "Educators and business leaders have wasted precious time and resources looking for external solutions. Times of uncertainty and relentless pressure prompt an understandable tendency to want to know what to do. The first insight is that there is no definitive answer to the "how" question...They can get ideas, directions, insights, but they can never know exactly how to go about it because such a path is exceedingly complex, and it changes as they work with their organization's unique personalities and cultural conditions. Realizing that there is no answer, that we will never arrive in any formal sense, can be quite liberating. Instead of hoping that the latest technique will at last provide the answer, we approach the situation differently. Leaders for change get involved as learners in real reform situations. They craft their own theories of change, consistently testing them against new situations. They become critical consumers of management theories, able to sort out promising ideas from empty ones" (p. 2-3).

The process of accreditation may well lend itself to support institutional change as it relies on the

self-study which may provide space for school leaders to craft, implement and collect data against change theories enacted within their communities and may suggest why the leaders, particularly the principals, in the Cushing and Flynn studies reported such a positive experience with NEASC.

It should be noted that because NEASC accreditation, including ACE, requires the input and participation of all members of the school, it may not be the senior leadership driving the process. Frequently mid-level managers (curriculum coordinators, grade-level coordinators, etc), teachers or operations managers (compliance coordinators, bursar, etc.) are appointed significant areas of oversight towards the completion of the self-study. This raises questions as to whether the transformational impact of accreditation could be achieved without a school leader, as described by Fullan, is at the helm of the process. In their work on educational leadership, management and responsibility, Connelly, James & Fertig (2017) build on the concept of the human drivers of school transformation by examining the differences between educational leaders and managers. They conclude that

> "educational management entails carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in an educational institution in which others participate. Carrying a responsibility of this kind is a state of mind and does not necessitate actions, though it typically and frequently does. In contrast, educational leadership is the act of influencing others in educational settings to achieve goals and necessitates actions of some kind. When those carrying a delegated responsibility act in relation to that responsibility, they influence and are therefore leading" (p. 1).

To that end, it could be theorized that school administrators, not typically associated with senior leadership, may also be impactful in driving transformational change should they be granted the responsibility for driving processes associated with change.

2.7 Research questions

As noted in chapter one, the research questions for this study aim to understand the influence of the new ACE accreditation protocol upon schools by asking:

1. What is the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools who have undertaken ACE accreditation protocol?
2. How has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?
3. To what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?

Specifically, these questions are designed to explore the degree to which the ACE protocol addresses the accreditation critiques raised by scholars such as Rothstein et al. and Woodward to gauge the degree to which ACE may provide new accreditation experience and drive educational change within these schools which may differ from previous NEASC accreditation models such as those explored by Cushing and Flynn. The data set for this study was comprised of seven schools. Supporting data were also provided through interviews with two ACE designers. More details on the data set are provided in chapter four.

There is currently no academic research on the efficacy of the ACE protocol, so to date there is no published evidence responding to NEASC/CIE's claim that ACE "aims to transform rather than 'improve' schools and reshapes accreditation into an instrument to enable systemic change" (NEASC/CIE 2016). To address the research questions, this study utilizes a case study approach including interviews with the designers of the ACE protocol, a review of written reports provided to NEASC by NEASC/CIE member schools participating in the ACE protocol, and direct interviews with school personnel.

Chapter Three: Understanding ACE

Background:

As noted in chapter one, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges is the oldest accreditation agency in the United States. Chapter three begins with an overview of the historical accreditation process within NEASC and summary of the events preceding the development of NEASC's Commission on International Education (CIE). Understanding the structural predecessor to ACE is useful for identifying shifts in the new procedure, and the context of NEASC's relationship with schools outside of the U.S. helps to understand both the development of the ACE protocol as well the selection of schools for this study. The chapter continues with a consideration of the theoretical framework underpinning ACE, including background on the development of this framework as constructed by two ACE designers, Peter Mott and Greg Curtis. In addition to the published information on the NEASC/CIE website, some of the information for this chapter was gathered by direct interviews with Mott and Curtis as part of the research process for this study. The chapter ends with a review of the current structure and process of ACE. In addition to providing necessary context for this study and the support of the significant research questions, this chapter is significant as it marks the first codification of the development of the ACE accreditation protocol in academic literature.

3.1 The Evolution of NEASC/CIE

A summary of NEASC's involvement in schools located outside of the United States is provided in *NEASC 1985-2010: Companion to the One Hundred Year History* (Prince 2013). Founded in 1885, NEASC serviced schools and colleges primarily in the New England region. In 1955 the U.S. State Department requested NEASC consider extended accreditation services to American-sponsored schools around the world (p. 88). Collaborating with members of the European Council of International Schools (ECIS), NEASC formed an advisory committee in 1971 to explore accreditation of American-sponsored schools and established the Committee on Overseas schools in 1978 (p. 94). The committee was renamed American/International Schools Abroad (CAISA) in the early 1990s (p. 97) and finally became the Commission on International Schools (CIE) in 2014. Standards for accreditation membership were developed and codified and American-sponsored independent schools around the world began to obtain NEASC accreditation beginning in 1981s (p. 95). To help contextualize differences of the ACE protocol from earlier NEASC/CIE accreditation formats, it may be useful to develop an understanding of

its immediate predecessor, known as the *8th Edition*.

3.2 Review of NEASC/CIE Accreditation under the 8th Edition

Multiple academic studies have written descriptions of the NEASC's accreditation process for secondary and postsecondary schools residing within and outside of the United States (Cushing 1999, Lubinescu et al., 2001, Provezis 2010, Eaton 2011, Fertig 2015). It is important to note that, until 2016, NEASC/CIE utilized an accreditation protocol that was co-created with the Council of International Schools (CIS), a membership organization for international schools. The protocol contains three main elements: (1) a preparatory visit to determine if the school is ready to enter a period of internal reflection, (2) a 12-24 month self study where the school community examines and rates itself against seven accreditation standards, and (3) a team visit where a group of external peers observes the school and provides feedback against the standards and the school's conclusions from the self study. Appendix A contains summary of the NEASC/CIE accreditation protocol as presented in the *Main Guide to School Evaluation & Accreditation: CIS-NEASC 8th Edition* (Gallo & Woodward 2014. p. 8-10) which was utilized by NEASC/CIE from 2010 and at the time of the study, remained in effect for some NEASC/CIE accredited schools.

The 8th Edition accreditation protocol was utilized collaboratively by both NEASC/CAISA and CIS until 2010, when CIS announced that it would be developing an independent accreditation process as a strategic phasing-out of joint accreditation protocols. The potential severing of collaborative ties between NEASC/CAISA and CIS created a space in which NEASC/CAISA could explore a new vision for accreditation, a vision to be developed by educator Peter Mott.

3.3 A Vision of Change

Peter Mott served as the Director of the American International School of Zurich (1989-2001) and the Zurich International School (2001-2012). During his time as a Director, Mott personally oversaw three successful NEASC accreditation cycles in his schools under earlier editions of the protocol, thus gaining first-hand experience of the accreditation process from the school perspective. Mott also served on the boards of the Council of International Schools, NEASC/CAISA, later becoming the chairman of NEASC/CAISA, where he participated in numerous school accreditation visits (NEASC/CIE 2018). In an interview for this study (Raccio 2018), Mott shared his perspective and opinions on the historic limitations of the school accreditation process based on his many years as a visitor for NEASC accreditation teams. From that experience, he identified that the feedback provided to schools by accreditation teams

frequently held similar themes: policies on special needs must be developed, the board must define what internationalism means in the context of the school, fire doors must be brought up to code, etc. Mott questioned the impact of the accreditation process in general, and specifically the *8th Edition,* had on school improvement. He became personally concerned about the lack of school improvement resulting from accreditation when he considered the performance of his own son who had attended Zurich International School. When Mott inquired as to why his son, a student who performed exceedingly well on standardized assessments but consistently attained poor grades on school report cards, could not manage to improve his grades, his son responded that he was bored, school did not challenge him, and he did not feel motivation to engage in the compliance-based work required by his teachers. Despite the excellent reviews that Zurich International School received for its innovative academics, during his time as Head of School Mott "began to wonder if we were duping ourselves into thinking we were progressive". He noted that the school, driven by the NEASC/CAISA accreditation process, was continuously "tweaking things on the edges, but there was no real change or improvement" to help meaningfully address the needs of students like his son. He wondered how he could catalyze curricular changes yielding an "atmosphere of disruption" from the status quo, and how external agencies could help established schools like his drive such disruptive changes.

In July 2012, Peter Mott was appointed chairman of NEASC's Commission on American International Schools Abroad (NEASC/CAISA). Mott now had a new platform from which to consider the role that NEASC/CAISA accreditation could potentially influence a school, away from the problematic traditional pillars of conformity and compliance highlighted by academics such as Ken Robinson (Schwartz 2016), and towards a cultivation of learning spaces that appear more like an "interactive museum of learning opportunities" (NEASC/ACE 2016. p. 1) as espoused by Yong Zhao. Mott drafted two lists, one of ten elements he believed were important for learning communities, labeled "principles" and another list of items required for schools to function, labeled "foundations." Mott shared these ideas with the standing NEASC commissions in 2013. As a part of this vision, Mott successfully advocated for NEASC/CAISA to rebrand by deemphasizing the "American" element of the commission, instead renaming to the Commision on International Education, NEASC/CIE.

During the interview for this study, Mott explained that he viewed the decoupling of the long-standing collaboration from CIS and NEASC/CIE as an unique opportunity to introduce his vision for a new accreditation protocol. He formed a small team to assist in the development of this new protocol. A draft plan was circulated in 2015 for feedback and Mott solicited the Heads

of NEASC/CIE member schools to help pilot the new protocol, which was launched at the International School of Prague in 2016

3.4 Theoretical Frame for ACE

As noted above, Mott strongly believed that traditional methods for accreditation were not sufficient for supporting schools in the development of learning environments necessary to equip students for success in the 21st century. In the interview for this study, he noted how he shared Richardson & Dixon's (2017) belief that modern schools seeking to transform the learning experiences for students should be guided by *Ten Principles for Schools of Modern Learning* that (p. 7):

1. "Have clearly articulated and shared beliefs about learning that are lived in every classroom.
2. Live a mission and a vision deeply informed by new contexts for learning.
3. Have cultures where personal, self-determined learning is at the center of student and teacher work.
4. See curriculum as something that is co-constructed to meet the needs and interests of the child.
5. Embrace and emphasize real-world application and presentation to real audiences as assessment for learning.
6. See transparency and sharing as fundamental to a powerful learning environment.
7. Use technology first and foremost as an amplifier for learning, creating, making, connecting, communicating, collaborating, and problem solving.
8. Develop and communicate in powerful ways new stories of learning, teaching, and modern contexts for schooling.
9. Encourage community wide participation in the equitable, effective education of children.
10. Embrace and anticipate constant change and evolution".

To aid in his work of applying such principles of modern learning to the accreditation process, Mott organized a design team consisting of academic scholars Greg Curtis and Kevin Bartlett. During a phone interview for this study in June 2018, Curtis shared that the trio maintained a common frustration with the contemporary school accreditation. Curtis explained that to address this frustration, the trio wanted to develop an accreditation process that, (1) was focused on school growth and deemphasized compliance, (2) was integrative rather than additive. The process should fit into school growth plans, (3) was explicit about expectations for schools in the

21st century, and (4) utilized a backwards design mindset, helping schools to build a roadmap towards where they wanted to be.

Historically, NEASC/CIE accreditation examined schools against two benchmarks (Gallo & Woodward 2014).

> " (i). The School's own Guiding Statements
> Each school is required to have clear Guiding Statements (Philosophy, Vision, Mission, Objectives, etc. and is evaluated in terms of how successful it is in meeting its own stated purposes.
>
> And
>
> (ii). The Standards for Accreditation
> Each school is required to align with a set of written standards in each area of its operations. These standards have been developed and endorsed by educational peers representing the accrediting agency."

The benchmarks of the 8th Edition, while naming mission and vision as important reporting elements - did not explicitly focus on the connection between the two in promoting school improvement. In his book *Leading Modern Learning* (Curtis & McTighe 2016), Curtis argued that "a lack of alignment between vision and mission creates a rudderless ship with little chance of achieving real improvement for students" (p. 23). Expanding on his writing during the interview for this study, Curtis noted that too often schools construct generalistic mission statements that describe a means to achieving an outcome, but fail to very clearly articulate the ends for the mission. He argued that the traditional approach of accreditation teams regarding the Guiding Statements benchmark, to confirm the existence of school mission and vision statements and review the programs, resources or facilities in place to support the mission, rather than the use of specific results as demonstrated by students, created a core impediment to the usefulness of accreditation in driving school change. Curtis suggested that shifting the focus of the accreditation process towards "impacts", which he identified in his book as the "desired student learning outcome that represents the aspirations of [the] vision and the core of [the] mission" (p. 24), would encourage schools to operationalize a way to evaluate and communicate students learning as a result of the school's mission. Tilting the environment of accreditation to focus on impacts, he argued, would help schools to achieve the intended outcome of the process and drive true school transformation in ways not experienced previously.

3.5 Inputs, Outputs and Impacts

In considering how the ACE accreditation process could provide a roadmap for schools to focus on the transformation of the learning environment in a different way from the previous NEASC accreditation editions, the ACE design team employed the Input:Output:Impact framework developed by Curtis and McTighe (2016). In this model, inputs, outputs, and impacts are defined as (p. 30-31):

- Inputs: The actions, processes and resources needed to achieve desired outputs. Examples can include, but are not limited to, funding streams, professional development opportunities, staff time allocation, etc.
- Outputs: Tangible results of organizational inputs. The programs and structures needed to achieve desired inputs. Examples can include, but are not limited to, curriculum maps, student programs, courses of study, etc.
- Impacts: The desired observable and measurable disciplinary or transdisciplinary student learning outcomes as related to the mission. Examples can include, but are not limited to, student, teacher and community statements about learning, metacognitive opportunities (self reflection, peer review), etc.

The framework is intended to "focus a school's resources and actions on the impacts articulated for the school. This focus is important and often missing in school-improvement planning and implementation" (p. 28). Whereas the framework conceptualized by Curtis & McTighe (2016) is not dissimilar to the logical frameworks frequently applied to program evaluation across different sectors (Collins 2018), it did present a novel focus for the NEASC accreditation process. As seen in the diagram below, the Input:Output:Impact framework purposely makes a direct connection between the organizational mission and the learning impacts for students. The framework drives backwards planning from the mission to the strategic decisions regarding the allocation of resources necessary to achieve the mission:

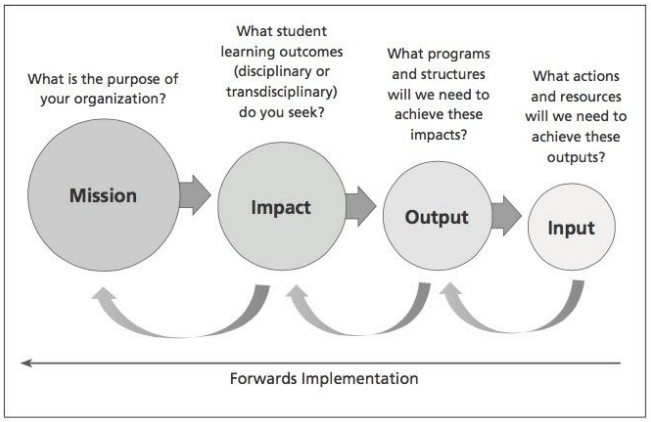

Figure 3. Input : Output : Impact Framework
Curtis & McTighe (p. 29)

3.6 Understanding ACE: Current Structure

In an effort to clearly distinguish this protocol as a new approach towards school development, Mott and the design team purposely avoided the use of "traditional accreditation language", identifying instead three key domains they believed necessary to create an impactful "learning ecosystem". Mott identified these as Learning Architecture (A), Learning Culture (C), and Learning Ecology (E). These domains of "the ACE acronym represents the three domains of its interdependent and inter-related 'Learning Eco-System'" that weave throughout the accreditation protocol (NEASC/ACE 2016 p. 3). This part of the chapter will define the key elements of ACE and describe the overall process.

Recognizing the necessity of organizational structure while simultaneously attempting to limit the emphasis on compliance elements in ACE, the protocol is divided into "two distinct parts: five Foundation Standards and ten Learning Principles. As the term implies, the ACE Foundation Standards constitute the basic building blocks necessary for a school to function and ensure that fundamental operational requirements are satisfied. While the Learning Principles embrace a transformative approach designed to change 'schools' into reflective learning communities, the Foundation Standards represent the transactional relationships, structures, policies and systems without which a learning community cannot exist" (p. 3). The overall ACE accreditation protocol entails three phases and is illustrated in Figure 2, below:

- Phase 1: Application: including a Foundations Review and a Foundations visit
- Phase 2: Candidacy and Internal Reflection: Schools self-reflect on the Learning Principles followed by a Learning Principles visit consisting of two NEASC/CIE members. Feedback, in the form of guiding questions crafted into a learning principles

report shaped by observations made in situ, is provided on the Learning Principles report. Following the visit, the school enters an Internal Reflection period including the production of an Internal Reflections report. This report helps to guide the work of the External Review visit.

- Phase 3: External Review including a one-week visit by a full team from NEASC/CIE. The visiting team completes a report for the NEASC board. The report will consist of:
    - The Team's observations with respect to the 10 ACE Learning Principles
    - The Team's assessment of the "Four C's"
    - The Team's recommendation with respect to any area(s) of Distinguished Achievement by the Learning Community
    - The Team's recommendation with respect to follow-up action and subsequent reviews or visits
    - The Team's recommendation with respect to the Learning Community's accreditation status (p. 16)

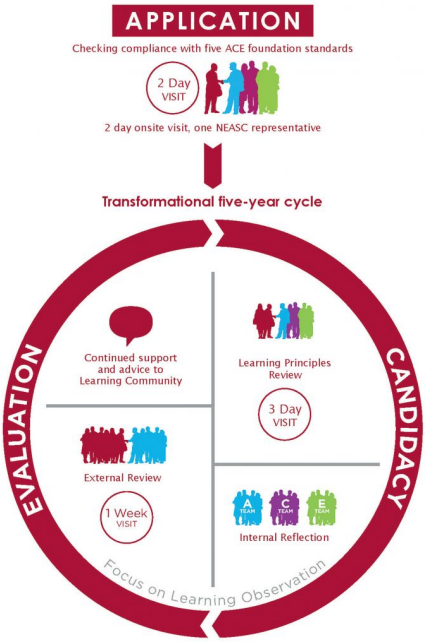

Figure 4: Relationship between the three phases of the ACE accreditation protocol (NEASC/ACE 2016, p. 8)

Phase 1: Application, Foundations Review and a Foundations Visit (NEASC/ACE 2016, p. 8-10) Schools approaching NEASC/CIE for an initial accreditation are required to complete a general application to determine if the school is a viable candidate for ACE and a good fit for NEASC/CIE membership. Schools are required to report on their founding purpose, legal structure, location, finances, facilities, and educational services. The application is reviewed and

if it is determined that ACE accreditation mutually beneficial to both organizations, the school is forwarded to the foundations review. Schools may also be deferred or rejected for accredited by NEASC/CIE.

Believing that it has a responsibility to ensure the safety, security and sustainability of its accredited schools, NEASC/CIE conducts a foundations review for all schools seeking initial or re-accreditation with ACE. The compartmentalization of this review as an independent step in the overall accreditation process marks a distinct difference between the 8th and ACE accreditation protocols. Schools must complete a foundations report that includes a written description and examples of evidence to substantiate the narrative against five foundations standards: Learning Structure; Organizational Structure; Health, Safety and Security; Finance, Facilities and Resources; and Ethical Climate. Schools are also asked questions regarding the learning principles at this stage, allowing NEASC/CIE to ascertain the degree to which schools are considering the implications of the learning principles before progressing into that stage of the accreditation protocol. Following the submission of the report, a two-day visit is conducted by a NEASC/CIE visitor to verify and/or seek further clarification on the foundation standards. The foundation visit also includes a professional development workshop where the NEASC/CIE visitor can clarify the full ACE protocol and further confirm the ability for a school to address the ACE learning principles. NEAC/CIE determines an award decision for progression to the next phase of the ACE protocol based on compliance with the ACE Foundation Standards and a determination that the school is considered to be "thinking about" the learning principles.

Phase 2: Candidacy and Internal Reflection (p. 10-14)

Schools successfully completing the foundations phase of the ACE protocol progress into the candidacy and internal reflection phase of the accreditation cycle. Schools in this phase are evaluated by the following guiding questions:

- "Where is the school currently in its progress towards becoming a true learning community?
- Does the school demonstrate the Conceptual Understanding, Commitment, Competency, and Capacity to achieve accreditation" (p. 11) and implement the learning principles within the community?

The learning principles feature predominantly in this stage of the ACE protocol. Each principle directly connects to a domain of ACE: principles 1-4 form the learning architecture (blue), 5-8 learning culture (red) and 9-10 learning ecology (green). A summary of the learning principles is

provided in the table below:

ACE Domain	Learning Principle	Definition
Learning Architecture	Learning Goals	Learners demonstrate understandings, competencies, knowledge, dispositions, and values that will allow them to become responsible and successful citizens.
Learning Architecture	Dimensions of Learning	Learning encompasses creative, moral, social, experiential and entrepreneurial dimensions.
Learning Architecture	Assessment for, of, and as Learning	Assessment measures the effect of learning on the learner. Assessment for, of and as learning includes qualitative as well as quantitative criteria.
Learning Architecture	Learning Perspectives	Meaningful learning is extended when learners explore the unfamiliar, consider a range of perspectives, and take informed risks. Mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning.
Learning Culture	Learner Engagement and Autonomy	Learners are engaged with and inspired by their learning. They have autonomy over their learning and make informed choices, supported by teachers acting as coaches and mentors.
Learning Culture	Research and Reflections on Learning	Research, reflection, and future design-oriented thinking are valued and acted upon by the community of learners.
Learning Culture	Inclusiveness of Learning	The learning community embraces a culture of inclusiveness.
Learning Culture	Governance and Leadership for Learning	Governance, leadership, and management support, embody, and promote the organization's intended Learning Impacts, norms and values.
Learning Ecology	Learning Space and Time	The design of learning spaces and the structuring of learning time are driven and shaped by the learning community's intended Learning Impacts.
Learning Ecology	Learning Community	Respectful, healthy, ethical relationships and interactions create a true sense of community. Communication is honest and transparent. Community values are clearly stated, actively lived, and define a distinct, sustained identity.

Table 3: ACE Learning Principles
NEASC/CIE (NEASC/ACE 2016, p. 6)

The “4 C’s” also feature prominently in this stage of the ACE protocol and are defined by NEASC/CIE as:

- “Conceptual Understanding of effective learning and its Impact on the learner.
- Commitment to implementing achievable and realistic Learning Plans.
- Competence in designing plans that achieve the desired Impacts on learning and on learners.
- Capacity to implement the Learning Plans and embed them in the institutional fabric”.

Schools complete a learning principles report including the following questions for all ten learning principles:

- “Where on the Transformational Learning Continuum does the learning community believe it currently stands with respect to the ten Learning Principles?
- Where does the learning community want to be in the future?
- What are the drivers for change and potential challenges faced by the learning community in implementing change? How will the learning community demonstrate the "4 C's" — Conceptual Understanding, Commitment, Capacity and Competency?
- What aspects of its Learning Architecture, Culture and Ecology does the learning community invite the Visitors to focus on?” (p.12)

Following the submission of the learning principles report, a three-day, site-based learning principles review is conducted by two NEASC/CIE visitors who will:

- “sign off on the Foundation Standards and verify that identified deficiencies have been remedied/addressed.
- observe learning.
- understand where the school currently is in its progress towards becoming a true learning community.
- assess the learning community's conceptual understanding of and commitment to the ACE Learning Eco-System as well as the community's capacity and competency for implementing change.
- explain the Internal Reflection process and agree on a timeline for submitting the Internal Reflection Report and hosting the External Review Team.” (p.12)

The NEASC/CIE visitors will produce a report commenting on the above items and making specific recommendations for the school to consider when conducting their final element of the candidacy phase, the internal reflection. During this time, schools are expected to conduct a more

thorough evaluation of their current standing against the ten learning principles and develop "a limited number of major learning plans which the learning community believes will achieve intended impacts ... aligned with the learning principles… and conclude whether the learning community has the capacity and competence to enact the major learning plans and/or whether external support and advice may be needed." (p. 13)

Phase 3: External Review (p. 15-17)

Believing that schools benefit from "constructive feedback from professional peers" the external review consists of four to six NEASC/CIE visitors conducting a one-week site evaluation where they engage in "structured, inquiry-based conversations, observations of learning and review of evidence of impacts" (p. 15) that were provided in the internal review study. The visitors will produce an external review report containing:

- "The Team's observations with respect to the 10 ACE Learning Principles
- The Team's assessment of the "Four C's"
- The Team's recommendation with respect to any area(s) of Distinguished Achievement by the Learning Community
- The Team's recommendation with respect to follow-up action and subsequent reviews or visits
- The Team's recommendation with respect to the Learning Community's accreditation status." (p. 16)

Visitor feedback regarding the school's "evolution into a Learning Community" (p. 15), is charted into onto a Learning Dashboard of the Transformational Learning Continuum. A sample dashboard appears as:

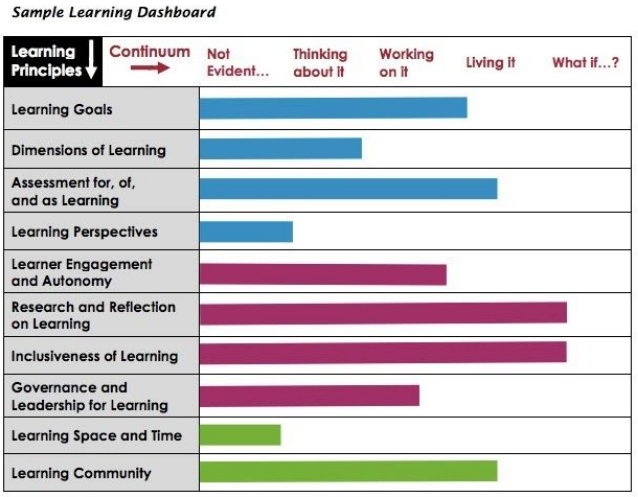

Figure 5: Sample learning dashboard for the ACE Transformational Learning Continuum (NEASC/ACE 2016, p. 12)

Each category on the Continuum is defined as:

Not evident…	The learning community has not yet begun to reflect on this Core Principle. The institution maintains traditional programs, structures, practices, and conceptual understandings. It is committed to improving "what is", and may claim to embrace 21st century learning and teaching principles, but has not yet recognized or articulated the implications of this claim on all aspects of its operations. Systems and programs are not intentionally aligned to support learning Impact; when they do lead to intended learning Impacts it is by chance rather than by design.
Thinking about it… (Exploring; establishing the 'why' and 'what')	The learning community has begun to explore the concept of 'community': what are its values, how does it live them, who belongs to it, what do members need from it, what can they bring to it? There is a growing understanding that individuals and groups move from first attraction, through engagement, to a long-term connection as alumni and parents of alumni. This has led to thinking about concepts important in building community, and ideas like diversity, transparency, sustainability, communication and collaboration are emerging as key drivers.
Working on it… (Building; establishing the 'how')	Community core values, agreements and commitments are being developed. These are creating a strong sense of identity and loyalty towards the learning community. Communication systems are reviewed for effectiveness and efficiency; new opportunities and platforms for stakeholder groups to provide feedback and suggestions in response to the learning community's goals are being created. New approaches to engaging the community are being introduced and tested.
Living it… (Implementing; defining	The values of the learning community are known to and supported by all stakeholders, resulting in a values-based identity, a 'cycle of engagement' and clearly communicated expectations. When there are substantive

'metrics' of success)	breaches of these values, appropriate action is taken. Major decisions and directions are communicated in accurate, transparent ways. The time, talent, connections and economic capacity of community members are mobilized in support of the community's goals. Stakeholders feel welcomed and included, and are proud to be part of a vibrant, open, healthy learning community. Evidence of desired Impacts is regularly evaluated.
"What if...?" (Transforming; shifting the paradigm)	Having come this far, what if we…? These practices are innovative, unique, and constitute a shift in defining the purpose, practice, and Impact of education. Learning communities with this level of understanding, clarity of purpose, ability to redefine their aspirations and determination to reinvent themselves, produce learners and leaders who are well prepared to shape the future and 'see things that are not yet on the page'.

Table 4: Definitions for Learning Principle Report School Self-Assessment Ratings (NEASC/ACE 2016, p. 25-26)

According to NEASC/CIE (p. 18), the ACE Transformational Learning Continuum attempts to position ACE as "a growth- rather than deficit-oriented accreditation model [where] learning communities may enter the process at any stage of development. ACE accommodates both young and mature learning communities provided they are aligned with Foundation Standards. ACE does not require a learning community to design a "strategic plan" separate from and in addition to its Internal Reflection. Indeed, the learning community's conclusions, insights, and Learning Plans derived from its Internal Reflection become its design for the future."

The learning principles report provides the foundation upon which schools begin their internal reflection and development of learning plans. How an analysis of the learning principle reports contribute directly to answering the significant research questions for this study is addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

The case study employed in this research investigated the influence of the new ACE accreditation protocol upon schools undertaking the accreditation process via ACE. Chapter four explains the rationale for the approach to the research and method of analysis while also describing the participants, data collection methods, ethical considerations for, and limitations of this study.

4.1 Exploratory Case Study Approach

The exploratory nature of this study lent itself naturally to a qualitative case study approach. A case study is described by Yin (2014) as "preferred when examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" (p.12). The data gathered allows a researcher to describe a "contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in-depth and within its real-life context" (Yin 2014. p. 16). Given that ACE was launched in 2017, there was no historical data regarding the impact of this protocol at the time of this study. A controlled comparison between ACE and other accreditation models such as the NEASC/CIE 8th Edition was not possible within a singular school and comparisons across schools utilizing different accreditation models may have introduced too many variables to yield valuable results. As a result, a case study approach examining the experience of ACE within singular schools provided the most appropriate methodological approach to address the significant research questions. Finally, this study is exploratory in so far as it aims to understand how early adopters of the ACE experienced the protocol within their individual schools and may create a foundation upon which further studies regarding the efficacy of this protocol as a transformative experience can be explored or measured.

Drawing from Yin's (2009) six data sources for case studies, three major sources: (1) direct interviews with the ACE design thinkers and key stakeholders in the NEASC/CIE community (2) documentation in the form of learning principle reports and (3) participant interviews served as the primary sources of data for this study. These data sources were selected to aid in answering the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools who have undertaken ACE accreditation protocol?
2. How has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?
3. To what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?

An overview of the sequencing of these data sets and explanation of how each source supports the research questions for this study are outlined in the table below:

Data source	Details, sequence, and position within the study	Significance for the Research Questions of this study
Direct interviews with ACE designers	Unstructured Phone/Web interviews with Mott and Curtis were conducted in summer 2018 prior to the analysis of learning principle reports. Understanding how design thinkers defined terms such as impact and transformation provided the context necessary for the development of definitions that drove the coding of learning principle reports and later administration interviews.	The interviews helped to develop an understanding of the expectations of ACE and the rationale behind those expectations. This foundational understanding helped to contextualize the experience of schools participating in the ACE protocol. This understanding directly supported the subsequent interviews with school administrators which addressed the first research question.
Analysis of learning principle reports	Requests for participant schools were made in spring 2018. Learning principle reports were collected through early autumn 2018. Reports were analyzed mid-autumn 2018 prior to interviews with school administrators.	Analysis of learning principle reports provided initial insight into the second research questions regarding the degree to which the protocol may have impacted learning practices. This analysis helped to understand how frequently a school wrote in terms of educational transformation, thus providing useful context for later interviews with school administrators. It also provided a basis for comparison against later interview data.
Direct interviews with participating school administrators	Semi-structured interviews were conducted with an administrator at each school participating in the study were conducted in late autumn 2018. The interviews were coded to identify and organize emerging themes regarding the overall experience of schools with the ACE protocol. The data were then analysed against the three research questions.	Interviews with school administrators provided an opportunity to address all three research questions.

Table 5: Overview of the Research Process Including Datasets, Timeline and Significance

More details regarding each dataset are provided later in chapter four and resulting data are

presented in chapter five. Additional documentation, in the form of emails or additional supplementary materials provided on an individual basis by school administrators, was added to the dataset. Utilization of multiple data sources provided for some level of data triangulation (Farquhar & Michels 2016).

Following the guidance of Merriam (2009), a limited number of non-random participants were purposefully identified for participation in the study, and the cross-sectional snapshot provided by the seven schools served as units of analysis to investigate the impact of ACE. Details regarding these participants follows in the next section.

4.2 Participating Schools

The sample choice was drawn from all schools, globally, that were engaged the ACE protocol in some way at the time of the study. The researcher identified these schools in spring of 2018 when NEASC/CIE published a list of all schools requiring initial or re-accreditation visits during fall 2018. Given that only 45 schools were engaged in ACE at the time, all schools were considered to be viable options for the study sample and no specific considerations were made to curate a sample that provided representation of the different types of NEASC/CIE member school or to avoid the overrepresentation of particular school types, etc. To recruit participants for this study, the researcher emailed all schools scheduled to host a Learning Principles Visit (LPV) or an External Review Visit (ERV) from May 2018 - December 2018 inviting them to participate in the research study (see Appendix B). Schools were informed that although the researcher has served as a visitor for NEASC/CIE teams, there was no connection between the research and NEASC/CIE and the sole purpose of this study was doctoral research at the University of Bath. An informed consent to participate form (see Appendix C), on University of Bath letterhead, introduced the researcher and overviewed the purpose of and requirements for participation in the study. Of the 29 contacted schools, six indicated interest and submitted consent forms. In fall of 2018, NEASC/CIE published the list of all schools requiring initial or re-accreditation visits during the spring 2019 season and a second round of emails inviting schools to participate was sent to an additional sixteen schools. One additional school submitted a consent form to join the study at that time.

As noted on their website, NEASC/CIE “supports a wide range of American and international schools both within the US and around the globe” (NEASCd 2018). Schools accredited by NEASC/CIE may be descriptively categorized in many of the following ways:

- By Global Location and population density: Africa (Af); Asia (As); Carribean (C), Central, North or South America (CA, NA, SA), Europe (E), or Oceania (O); Urban (U), Suburban (Su) or Rural (R),
- By Institutional Age (in years); 0-5; 6-10, 11-20, 21-30, 30+
- By Funding: Non-Profit (NP) or For-Profit (FP),
- By Demographics: Coeducational (CEd) or not (NCEd); Faith Based (F) or not (NF); Primary (P), Secondary (S) or Full Age Range (3-18); Day (D), Boarding (B) or Both (D/B),
- By Size: Small (<200 pupils), Medium (Med. 200-1000 pupils) or Large (1000< pupils),
- By Language of Instruction: Bilingual (B) or English speaking (E),
- By Organizational Structure: Singular School (SS) or part of a larger network of schools (N),
- By Curricular offerings: International Baccalaureate (IB); U.S. Common Core (U.S.), or National Curriculum (NC)
- By Accreditation Status: Current accredited by NEASC (A); Candidate for Accreditation (CA); Jointly accredited with other organizations (JA)

The schools volunteering to participate in this study represented a diverse cross-section of the NEASC/CIE membership, as outlined in Table 6, below. To ensure anonymity, the names of all schools participating in the study were changed and assigned an abbreviation. The following table provides the anonymized name of the school as well as some of the descriptive categories that apply to the school:

School Name	Categorical Descriptors

	Location & Pop. Density	Institution-al Age	Funding	Demo-graphics	Size	Language of Instruction	Organiza-tional Structure	Curricular Offerings	Accredit-ation Status
Central School A (CSA)	E, U	0-5	NP	CEd, NF, S, D	Small	E	SS	IB, NC	CA
Central School B (CSB)	E, U	30+	NP	CEd, NF, 3-18, D	Large	E	SS	IB, CC	A, JA
Central School C (CSC)	E, S	21-30	FP	CEd, NF, 3-18, D	Med	E	N	IB, CC	A
Central West School A (CWA)	A, S	6-10	FP	CEd, NF, 3-18, D	Large	E	N	IB, CC	A, JA
Central West School B (CWB)	E, U	21-30	NP	CEd, NF, 3-18, D	Large	B	SS	IB, CC	A, JA
East School A (ESA)	A, S	21-30	NP	CEd, NF, 3-18, D	Large	E	SS	IB	A, JA
South School A (SSA)	SA, S	+30	NP	CEd, F, 3-18, D	Large	B	N	CC, NC	A, JA

Table 6: Summary of Participating Schools

4.3 Participating Administrators

As noted in the invitation to participate in the research study (see Appendix B), participating schools were required to identify a member of the administration, or someone who was overseeing/familiar with the production of the Learning Principles report to participate in a 35-40 minute phone/skype interview discussing the process that their school engaged in the preparation of the report. The invitation to participate in the study was emailed to the Head of School/Director/Principal, and in one case, it was that person who participated in direct interviews, while in other cases, a different administrator was appointed. The professional background of the Administrators who participated in the direct interviews varied widely, although they fell into one of four main categories:

- ❏ Head of School (Principal/Director, etc)
- ❏ Senior Leadership Team Member (Head of Division, Vice Principal/Deputy Head, etc.)
- ❏ Mid-Level Leader (Lead Teacher for a year group, team leader, curriculum coordinator, dean, etc.) who was appointed to oversee or manage the accreditation process or participate in ACE in a substantive way.
- ❏ Non-instructional Leader (Head of Compliance, Head of Operations, etc.) who was

appointed to oversee or manage the accreditation process or participate in ACE in a substantive way.

The following table describes the type of administrator participating in the direct interviews for each school.

Head of School	Senior Leadership	Mid-Level Leader	Non-Instructional
CSA	CSB, CWA	CWB, ESA, SSA	CSC

Table 7: Summary of Administrators Participating in Direct Interviews for Each School

To ensure anonymity for the school administrators participating in the direct interview, they were coded as A+School Abbreviation and referred to with third person plural pronouns to maintain gender neutrality.

Although data analyzed for this study was provided directly through participating schools, it is important to mention other stakeholders who supported the study who are directly affiliated with NEASC/CIE and have a "direct interest in its framing and success" (BERA 2018. p. 26). These individuals contributed access to relevant background and contextual data that are referenced throughout this paper and therefore, after receiving permission to be named (see Appendix D), their details are not anonymized. Three important contributors include:

- Jeff Bradley, director NEASC/CIS: Jeff "served as a NEASC/CIE Commissioner from 2009-2015, chairing accreditation visits to a wide range of international schools" (NEASC 2018). During his time as director for NEASC/CIS, Jeff directly oversaw the transition of accreditation services from the 8th Edition to the ACE protocol. Jeff chairs numerous ACE visits as well as facilitating training for ACE visitors globally.

- Peter Mott, former director NEASC/CIE. Peter served as the NEASC/CIE director from 2012 to 2017. At the time of this study, "Peter served in a part-time capacity as NEASC International Accreditation Leader. Previously Peter served as Director of Zurich International School (ZIS) from 2001-2012, and from 1989-2001 as Director of the American International School of Zurich (AISZ). In 2001 he was a Klingenstein Visiting Fellow at Columbia University. He served on the Boards of the Council of International Schools and of the Academy of International School Heads, and was a member of the Commission on American and International Schools Abroad (CAISA)" (NEASC 2018). Mott played an instrumental role in the development of ACE and is generally regarded as

the principle design thinker for the protocol.

- "Greg Curtis is an author and independent education consultant. He is currently based in Beijing and has spent much of his career working with international schools around the world in all-school capacities. Greg has been a technology director, a curriculum and professional learning director and a strategic planner for schools in Europe, North America, Australia and Asia" (Curtis 2018).

Although Bradley, Mott, and Curtis are not direct sponsors of this research, they can be considered significant stakeholders and as such, the researcher followed BERA suggested protocol in recognizing that "it is in researchers' interests that respective responsibilities and entitlements should be agreed with sponsors at the outset of the research. Where the sponsor acts essentially as a host or facilitator for research, researchers should, out of courtesy, inform them of the work they propose to undertake" (p. 27). Bradley served as a thought partner in the development of the research proposal and approved of the study prior to commencement. The participation of Mott and Curtis in the interviews provided important contextual background for understanding the development and aims of ACE. This background informed the development of the research questions by helping to hone the questions on the transformational elements of ACE and the impact the protocol had on learning practices. Bradley, Mott, and Curtis were informed that no access to any data generated in this research from participating schools would be given to NEASC, NEASC/CIE or to them as individuals nor would they or the organizations they represent have any control or influence over the final thesis.

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis Methods: Interviews with ACE Designers

Given the limited availability of information regarding the ACE protocol in the literature, this study began by seeking a greater understanding of the development, structure and goals of ACE through direct interviews with early ACE-design thinkers and other individuals directly connected to the launch of this protocol. These interviews provided an opportunity to understand the experience of key stakeholders in the launch of ACE, including an articulation of their goals for the protocol and what they envisioned the experience of participating in ACE would be like for schools. Developing an understanding of their vision for the experience of schools provides important contextual information against which to consider the research questions for this study and provides an opportunity for comparison between the idealized and actualized experience of participant schools in ACE.

A request for interviews was sent to the three major design thinkers in the development of the ACE protocol: Peter Mott, Greg Curtis and Kevin Bartlett. Responses were received from Mott and Curtis and a 60-minute, unstructured phone interview was conducted using guiding three prompts to drive the conversation:

1. Describe the historical development of the ACE protocol from the time of inception to present.
2. Considering the phrase 'Hindsight is 2020', what might you have done differently if you were going to engage in the process again?
3. How did you plan for measuring the impact of ACE on schools?

A summary of the historical development of ACE provided by these interviews is detailed in chapter three. The additional data regarding the goals for and challenges of ACE were organized into focal areas that are presented in chapter 5.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis Methods: Learning Principle Reports

Schools agreeing to participate in the study who completed the consent form were asked to share an electronic copy of their Learning Principles (LP) report which they had submitted to NEASC/CIE. As described in the previous chapter, the LP report required schools to reflect and comment on six prompts against each of the ten learning principles listed in Table 7. Prompts ask schools to consider both their perception of the current reality as well as the future design for their school and are summarized as follows:

Current Reality	
Prompt: *What it looks like when...*	Schools provide a rating for where they believe they currently are located on the learning continuum found in Figure 3 Schools must provide a rationale for their self-assessment. Definitions for each rating are found in Table 3.
Future Design	
Prompts: ● *Where do we want to be? We will have in place…* ● *What will we be looking for? Learners will be doing…* ● *What will be likely drivers of change?*	Schools comment on what they hope to achieve in the future. The answers to these prompts need not be excessively detailed; rather, they serve as a foundation from which schools will conduct a more in-depth self-reflection following a visit by the Learning Principle team.

• *Potential challenges or obstacles to change...*	
For the Learning Principle Visit	
Prompt: *Identify an aspect(s) pertaining to this Learning Principle that you would like the Visitors to focus on/be aware of in particular.*	Schools use this prompt to draw attention to the NEASC/CIE visiting team to specific areas of focus that relate to this learning principle.

Table 8: Guiding Prompts for ACE Learning Principles Report

While all of the prompts provided important context for understanding how a school rated itself on the learning continuum, a significant research question for this study asked "to what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?" Rather than analyzing the written responses to all of the guiding prompts listed in Table 6, this study zoomed in on how schools answered the prompt *Where do we want to be? We will have in place…* for learning principle, as this prompt aligned most closely to how a school may engage transformational educational change over time.

Provisional coding was utilized to analyze the prompts across the ten learning principles in each school report. Unlike other methods of first cycle coding where the researcher constructs codes based on emerging trends in the data sets, provisional coding utilizes a prearranged list of codes that "can be developed from anticipated categories or types of responses that may arise in the data yet to be collected. The provisional list is generated from such preparatory investigative matters as literature reviews related to the study, the study's conceptual framework and research questions" (Saldaña 2009. p. 120).

The provisional codes predetermined for this analysis were influenced by the Input:Output:Impact framework developed by Curtis and McTighe (2016) where each term was defined for this study as follows:

Code	Definition
Input	The actions, processes and resources needed to achieve desired outputs. Examples can include, but are not limited to: funding streams, professional development opportunities, staff time allocation, etc. Inputs widely align with the "Thinking About It" phase of the learning continuum.
Output	The programs and structures needed to achieve desired impacts. Examples can include, but are not limited to: curriculum maps, student programs, courses of

	study, etc. Outputs widely align with the "Working On It/Living It" phase of the learning continuum.
Impact	The desired observable and measurable disciplinary or trans-disciplinary student learning outcomes as related to the mission. Examples can include, but are not limited to: student, teacher and community statements about learning, metacognitive opportunities (self reflection, peer review), etc. Impacts widely align with the "Living It/What Next" phase of the learning continuum.

Table 9: Definitions of Provisional Codes Generated for Analysis of Learning Principle Reports

As described in chapter three, Curtis argued that schools maintaining greater emphasis on impacts are more likely to engage in transformational changes to the learning community. To that end, the aim of provisional coding of the learning principle reports was to determine the frequency with which a school answered the prompt *Where do we want to be? We will have in place…* with either input, output, or impact-oriented language. The percentage of sentences or phrases matching the definition of each category against the overall number of statements made was calculated for each category, providing a semi-quantitative picture of how frequently a school described itself in terms that align with the transformative paradigm of impacts. The analysis of the learning principle reports provided context and depth during later interviews with school administrators when they were asked to respond to the research questions for this study. The overall data are presented in chapter five and an analysis of both the learning principle reports and interview data against the research questions are provided in chapter six.

4.6 Data Collection and Analysis Methods: Direct Interviews

Following an analysis of the learning principle reports, schools were asked to identify an appropriate school leader with significant involvement in the ACE accreditation process to participate in a 30-45 minute interview regarding the school's experience with ACE. The purpose of conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews at this stage of the research process was to allow the researcher to "explore subjective viewpoints and to gather in-depth accounts of people's experiences" (Evans 2017. p. 2) with the ACE protocol. Interviews were conducted by video conferencing or phone and written notes were maintained by the researcher. Interviewees were provided an opportunity to ask clarifying questions before being asked a series of closed and open interview questions which are found in Appendix E.

Thematic analysis was utilized to investigate and organize the interview data. As described by Evans (2017) drawing from the work of Braun & Clarke (2006), “thematic analysis is a hugely popular analytic method ... it will be useful to researchers who position their work within either realist or constructionist paradigms within the social sciences” (p. 3). Thematic analysis helps the researcher to understand the meaning or significance that a subject may have regarding their participation in an event or experience and “examine how these constructions might reflect the ‘reality’ of participants’ lived experiences, the material or social contexts in which they live” (p. 3). As the interviews were transcribed, read and re-read, patterns were identified leading to the development of themes that spoke to the research questions (Evans 2017) regarding the experience and impact of the ACE protocol on a school. A data collection template designed as a resource by Prichard and Sweeney (2018) of the for-profit Pacific Research & Evaluation Associates (PREA) “to assist government staff, NGOs and community members to design and evaluation their community engagement and behaviour change project” (p. 1) was utilized in the organization of interview. A line-by-line analysis of interview text allowed the researcher to identify emergent themes throughout the interview which are described in detail in the next chapter.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

As noted by British Educational Research Association (BERA) President Gary McCulloch, “research related to education is varied and complex, rarely amenable to precise measurement or given to all-encompassing solutions to its many challenges. Nevertheless, the continued pursuit of improved knowledge and understanding of all aspects of education is vital for our democracy and social wellbeing. To this end ... guidelines are designed to support educational researchers in conducting research to the highest ethical standards in any and all contexts” (BERA 2018. p. iv). Ethical considerations, informed by BERA, the University of Bath, and general best practice guided all aspects of research - from initial inception through the collection, analysis and reporting of the findings.

Participants in the study required fair treatment, free of prejudice, and with the recognition that “differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant characteristic” would be handled with dignity (BERA 2018. p 6). Recognition of and appreciation for such differences was particularly salient for this study, as educators from across the world hailing from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds participated in this work. Additionally, because the research

involved the participation of schools currently working towards the completion accreditation, the researcher had to carefully "consider how to balance maximising the benefits and minimising any risk or harm to participants, sponsors, the community of educational researchers and educational professionals more widely" (BERA 2018. p. 8). Related to this, consideration was made for the participation by NEASC/CIE as an organization, who maintained a significant investment in both the evolution and deployment of ACE as well as an ethic of care to schools within their membership. Finally, it was necessary to ethically consider the role of researcher, who also was a trained NEASC/CIE visiting team member and served numerous accreditation teams over the past decade.

To address these concerns, initial conversations were held with NEASC/CIE Director Jeff Bradley, who indicated an interest in collaborating on this research. Mr. Bradley originally offered support in connecting the researcher to ACE schools by providing school contact information and, when appropriate, facilitating initial meetings between the researcher and school administrators, yet it was later decided no direct contact would be provided between the NEASC/CIE office and potential participants in order to ensure no potential conflict of interests between NEASC/CIE and schools seeking ACE accreditation. An outline of the research methodology, as well as a consent form including the right to withdraw (see Appendix F), was provided to and returned by NEASC/CIE prior to initial contact with candidate schools.

Potential candidates for the study were identified via a general accreditation list provided to all NEASC/CIE members, of which the researcher was one. Schools were contacted via an initial introductory email explaining the intention of the study and invited to opt-in to participate in the submission of learning principle report and subsequent study interviews. Potential participants were informed in writing that this research was being conducted as part of a doctoral thesis for the University of Bath and not being done for or by NEASC/CIE as outlined in both the initial email and consent form (see Appendix B and C). All schools electing to participate in the study were provided with the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. No payment, remuneration or other incentives were provided for participants.

Recognizing the "the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy" (BERA 2018. p. 21), individual schools participating in the study were informed in advance that appropriate data anonymization procedures would be maintained so as to avoid any opportunities to identify individual schools. Schools were informed that the results of this study will be shared with NEASC/CIE, the University of Bath and, potentially, the wider educational community;

however, at no point in the research process, including during the publication of results, would the identity of participants be disclosed. Also as noted earlier, accreditation by NEASC/CIE is a valuable commodity for schools in ensuring the quality of their educational program to their stakeholders. As such, there was a real possibility that potential participants could find a conflict of interest in reporting any negative elements to the ACE protocol for concerns of jeopardizing current or future accreditation. To that end, the researcher recommended an embargo on the publication of the dissertation in order to delay entry of the paper into the library catalogue. This delay would ensure that sufficient time would pass for participants who were actively involved ACE accreditation with NEASC/CIE and the completion of that process before the document may be available for review in full. Finally, reports shared with the researcher would be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

It is also important to consider ethical implications for the researcher in this study. As noted in BERA, "an important consideration is the extent to which a researcher's reflective research into their own practice impinges upon others – for example, in the case of power relationships arising from the dual roles of teacher/ lecturer/manager and researcher, and their impact on students and colleagues. Dual roles may also introduce explicit tensions in areas such as confidentiality. These may be addressed appropriately by, for example, making the researcher role very explicit…"(p.13). Given the role of the researcher as a long-standing member of NEASC/CIE, as well as a head of school connected to the wider international school community, such concerns were particularly salient for this study. As such, in both this study and research generally, "the researcher has the ethical task of making transparent the ways of reasoning that are carried out through the research act… In order to face this ethical request, it is necessary for the researcher to practice reflection on the whole inquiry work" (Mortari 2015. p. 2). To engage in such reflection, the researcher utilized a variety of techniques such as maintaining a reflective digital journal throughout the research process, calendar and task notes, regular supervisory discussions, maintenance of discussion logs and reflective note-writing in all stages of data collection.

4.8 Researcher Positionality

In her writing on action research, Rowe (2014) draws from the previous work of Herr and Anderson (2005) to summarize six positions that a researcher may hold in relation to the subjects of inquiry in a study including various types of insiders, outsiders or reciprocal collaborators (Rowe 2014. p.2). Rowe continues by noting that "positionality is multidimensional, and it is not uncommon for the researcher(s) to be closely positioned to the participants on some dimensions

and not on others" (p.3). In the case of this study, the researcher was an outsider to the study insofar as she was not affiliated with any of the participating schools, but as noted above, she was was a long-standing member of NEASC/CIE and a current head of school. Shared commonalities between the researcher and the participants, either by previous experience with NEASC/CIE, as a head of school (particularly for other senior administrators in the study), nationality, or gender undoubtedly influenced what is "perceived and understood as knowledge" (Rowe 2014. p. 3). The use of identical questions during semi-structured interviews as well as seeking additional clarification through the use of direct examples or participant definitions attempted to address issues relating to the perception of common understanding between the interviewer and interviewee.

Recognizing the role of personal bias in the process of coding both learning principle reports and interviews, as well as acknowledging that the employment of a second coder is frequently advised to support the validity of case study research (Pritchard & Sweeney 2018), the researcher prepared sample texts from the learning principle reports to be independently scored by a second coder. Special attention was paid to highlight texts that contained ambiguous language not clearly aligning with the Input:Output:Impact guidelines. Upon reflection that the process of double-coding was not disclosed in advance to participants at the onset of the study, a second coder was not utilized. Instead, the researcher ensured that opportunities for clarification regarding ambiguous texts were provided during direct interviews. For questions that emerged during the coding of the direct interviews, the researcher followed up with emails to individual participants, if necessary. Data from school interviews are found in the following chapter.

4.9 Limitations and Validity of the Study

The mixed-methods case study approach to this research, including interviews with ACE design thinkers, review and analysis of learning principle reports, and interviews with school administrators offered a useful window into the experience of schools with the newly-launched ACE protocol and aided in answering the significant research questions for this study. Of course, before considering any conclusions drawn from the data collected in this study, it is important to begin with consideration of the limitations and validity of this study as these limitations have direct impact on the emerging conclusions.

Sample Size

To qualify for this study, all schools must have been scheduled to receive a learning principles visit or an external review visit from May 2018 - May 2019. A total of 45 schools were invited to participate in the study, which is understood to have been nearly all schools engaged in the ACE protocol globally at the start of the study. Seven schools agreed to engage in the study by submitting their learning principle reports and participating in direct interviews. While the participation of these schools do offer valuable insights on their experiences with ACE, the limited sample size does not mean these results can be considered representative nor generalizable.

Participants and Culture

The schools participating in this study represented some level of diversity within the membership of NEASC/CIE accredited schools with regards to age of establishment, language of instruction, mission, etc.; however, the study is not representative of all types of NEASC/CIE schools. The cultural context in which a school was situated may have impacted the experience of the community with ACE. As such, the results of this study cannot be considered representative nor generalizable. Additionally, while 100% of schools in this study reported utilizing a collaborative approach whereby multiple community stakeholders participated in the development of the learning principle reports, only one school administrator was interviewed from each school to describe the experience of the community with ACE. In most cases, the invitations for participation in the study were sent directly to Heads of School or Principals, who in turn appointed an administrator for interview in this study. The perspectives held by the participating administrator may not be universally shared by fellow school leadership, faculty, staff, board members, students, families or other who may have engaged in the ACE protocol. A similar study conducted by Stump (2013) uncovered that universally-held beliefs regarding the impact of NEASC accreditation were not found across all stakeholder groups in the study. Additionally, it is worth remembering that "in any hierarchical school system, no matter how small, in which a principal has hiring and firing power and control over other working conditions, a teachers being interviewed … may not feel free to talk openly" (Seidman 2013. p. 45). Future studies of this nature could benefit from greater triangulation within interview groups, such as inclusion of heads of school or principals, board chairs and other stakeholders with positions of power as well as teachers or other individuals who participated in self-study teams.

It is important to recognize the multiple factors that may result in a divergence of experiences between the interviewed administrator and the wider school community. Although the positioning of the administrators provides a unique vantage point from which to view the activities of the school, it also introduces a power dynamic that may influence or bias their self-reporting. All administrators but one were white, had English as their primary language, and heralded from American or Western European educational systems - backgrounds that could significantly influence perceptions of ACE in ways that may vary from members of their community not sharing these common cultural elements.

Finally, the potential power dynamic between NEASC and schools participating in this study cannot be overlooked as potentially impactful on the study data. Despite efforts throughout all aspects of the research process to maintain a clear separation between the focus of this study and the NEASC, it is possible that administrators within schools seeking NEASC/CIE accreditation status may not feel comfortable or capable of a negative critique or the perception of a negative attitude towards ACE.

Researcher Bias

Kimmel (1999) ascertains that the researcher has a responsibility to clearly explain her or his role and communicate openly about in the investigation. In the case of this study, the researcher clearly articulated her position as a Head of School with more than 10 years of experience as a peer visitor for NEASC accreditation teams under the 7th and 8th Editions, as well as a trained visitor for the ACE protocol. While the researcher approached the study and participants through the neutral frame of a doctoral student at the University of Bath, Fontana and Frey (2005) argue that the goals of neutrality are "largely mythical" (p. 696). They go on to state that "interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers. Two (or more) people are involved in this process, and these exchanges lead to the creation of a collaborative effort called *the interview*" that "generates a contextually bound and mutually generated story" (p. 696). As such, the neutrality of the interviewer is called into question as potentially impossible nor desirable. The researcher's role as an educator and NEASC/CIE accreditor undoubtedly shaped the interpretation of the findings of this study. To mitigate this effect Creswell (2011) recommends that a researcher present their data to others, such as peers versed in qualitative research, for examination. In the specific case of this study, interview questions and data were presented to the study supervisor for feedback, but an examination of the data may have also benefited inter-coder process for both the coding of the learning principle reports and interview data. Peer coders not affiliated with this study or NEASC/CIE were identified and

excerpts from learning principle reports were prepared for their review, although their services ultimately were not employed as participating schools had not been notified the data would be shared with anyone beyond the researcher as part of the informed consent process. It is strongly recommended that future studies of this nature build in inter-coder opportunities as part of the study design.

Coding of Learning Principle Reports

Continuing with a consideration of coding, provisional coding utilizing the predetermined Input:Output:Impact framework was applied to all learning principle reports. Hedlund-de Witt (2013) explains that the application predetermined codes can be "useful for operating within the sphere of the pre-understandings and assumptions of a given theoretical (or meta-theoretical) construct" (p. 14). He cautions that researchers should "keep in mind that the pre-established coding scheme can be the result of a previous inductive research (in the style of grounded theory). Researchers should be attentive to the potential that the pre-existing scheme does not accommodate emergent aspects of the generated data" (p. 14). Although the application of this coding structure provided useful insights on the frequency of Input:Output:Impact language, space was not provided to identify or explore statements that might fall outside of this framework.

Interview Notes

As noted earlier, three stages of data collection were conducted throughout the study: informal interviews with members of the ACE design team, coding of learning principle reports and semi-structured interviews with administrators at participating schools. In the case of CSA and SSS, school administrators followed up with additional notes by email. Due to technological constraints, audio recording of interviews did not occur. Participants were informed that the researcher would be taking hand-notes during the interview. Hand-written data is frequently used in research, however, it does present limitations that must be mentioned here. One significant limitation is the inability to re-play the conversation. "Since researchers cannot replay the event to verify their field notes, these are often incomplete or biased. Thus, interpretations based on field notes are often too simplistic. Indeed, they allow only for the most coherent interpretation or the interpretation closest to the researcher's perspective to surface" (Tessier 2012. p. 449). Seidman (2013) also raises concerns with hand-recording that in interviews:

> "the participants' thoughts become embodied in their words. To substitute the researcher's paraphrasing or summaries of what the participants say for their actual works is to substitute the researcher's consciousness for that of the participant. Although

> inevitably the researcher's consciousness will play a major role in the interpretation of interview data, that consciousness must interact with the words of the participants recorded as fully and as accurately as possible" (p. 117).

Seidman's comments presuppose that the researcher inevitably paraphrases as part of the data capturing process. While the researcher consciously made a good-faith effort to record the interview as faithfully as possible, the raw data would undoubtedly be subject to greater researcher bias than had it been audio recorded. It is strongly recommended that such recordings are made, in addition to hand notes, for future studies of ACE where interviews may be utilized.

Validity of the Study

Eisenhart and Howe (2008) define validity as "the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from data" (p. 644). Multiple factors can contribute to research validity. In his own doctoral dissertation, Campbell (2013) helpfully summarized multiple protocols or procedures that may impact study validity from prominent researchers. Campbell's summarized list is provided in column one, on the left, below. Notes on how these factors were addressed in this study are provided in column two, on the right, below:

Factors Impacting Validity (Drawn from research, as summarized by Campbell 2013. pgs. 128-129)	*How Addressed in the Study*
"Multiple case design provides the opportunity for replication while conclusions are derived from different sources (Yin 2009).	Interviews with ACE design thinkers, analysis of learning principle papers and interviews with school administrators provided "between-method" triangulation with the rational that the "use of more than one method compensates for the weaknesses of the other one" (Farquhar & Michel 2016. p. 4)
Inclusion of multiple cases to expand the possibility of wider generalization and enhancing external validity (Merriam 2009).	Nearly 100% of schools engaged in the learning principle phase of the ACE protocol at the time of the study globally (45 in total) were approached for participation in the study. Seven schools participated as unique cases for this study.
Strong ethical conduct of the researcher (Merriam 2009).	The researcher adhered to BERA guidelines and a general best practice for research in education. Regular check in meetings with the thesis supervisor provided opportunities for feedback regarding the conduct and work of the researcher. Participants were treated

	respectfully, with dignity and thanked for their participation in the study.
Collection of solid evidence to mitigate possible concerns with validity (Maxwell 2005).	Where possible, opportunities to triangulate data were maintained including: ● Interviews were conducted independently with two of the three original ACE designers allowing for opportunities to identify areas of congruence and difference in the historical narrative. ● Learning principle reports were coupled with school interviews, providing to seek greater clarification on report findings.
Consistency of design and process that link the stories together (Mears 2009).	The design and process of this study provided the researcher with the opportunity for an in-depth examination of learning principle reports followed by direct interviews with school administrators. The consistency in this process allowed for the researcher to identify trends within schools as well as compare the experiences and outputs between schools.
Allowing the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy (Mears 2009).	A summary of interview notes were not provided to participants. Participants were encouraged to follow up via email with additional commentary.
The strength of the relationship developed between the researcher and participant and using multiple sources of data (Creswell 2007, 2009).	To build relationships, all interviews with participating schools began with an overview of the researcher's background and an opportunity for participants to ask any question of the researcher before or after the interview. The researcher maintained a personal connection with Bradley, Mott and Curtis via mutual participation in multiple conferences, workshops and accreditation teams over the past decade.
Openly disclosing the researcher bias (Creswell 2007, 2009).	In the report and in all interviews, the researcher disclosed her previous relationship to NEASC/CIE and role on accreditation teams.
Maintaining a "chain of evidence" (Yin 2009).	Supervisory notes were maintained following all check-in meetings between the researcher and supervisor. Google Suite was utilized in various ways to maintain a record of evidence and progression of

	work, including: ● Google Calendar - to maintain a record of all meetings, including interviews. ● Google Keep - to archive researcher on-going notes and reflections. ● Google Documents - to archive historical development of all writing. ● Email archives of all correspondence between researcher and schools. ● Digital (on google and on a local computer) and paper copies of Learning Principle reports were maintained by researcher. ● An interview spreadsheet of coded sentences from interview data Additionally, video recordings of ACE presentations by Peter Mott were collected from various ACE training workshops.
Maintaining objectivity when conducting the interviews and not leading the participants (Mears 2009).	The use of a semi-structured interview, where all participants were asked the same questions, helped to maintain objectivity between interviews. Open ended questions to help probe, rather than lead, participants were asked as follow up questions when necessary (University of Leicester. 2019).
Triangulation of data reduced the "potential problems of construct validity . . . because multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin 2009. pgs. 116-117).	In their paper research, Farquhar and Michels (2016) list five data triangulation categories: Data, Investigator/researcher, Theoretical, Methodological or Data Type, and Perceptual. Two of these five categories were utilized in this study: ● Data triangulation was maintained by the inclusion of multiple schools participating in the study. ● Methodological triangulation by the mixed-methods inclusion of both learning principle reports and interview data.

Table 10: How Factors Impacting the Validity of this Thesis as Drawn from Research (Campbell 2013. pgs. 128-129) are Addressed in this Study

This review of the limitations of the study, as well as the attempts to address validity, should provide a useful, critical lens through which to view the data, analysis, and conclusions generated for this study that follow in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five: Data Presentation

This chapter presents the data obtained from this study. The chapter begins with an overview of concepts that emerged from the interviews with ACE designers Peter Mott and Greg Curts regarding their expectations for what schools engaged in the ACE protocol should experience. Next, an overview of findings from the coding of the learning principles reports is presented followed by a summary of emergent themes resulting from the interview data with school administrators.

5.1 Emerging Concepts from ACE Designers

Interview data from Mott and Curtis provided important information regarding the development of ACE, the goals for the protocol and their expectations for what learning communities would experience when participating in the process. The interview content was summarized into four concept areas that helped drive the development of and desired outcomes for this new protocol:

- A "Manifesto" for Accreditation
- The Importance of Independent Thinking
- Scope of Influence
- Conflict of Interests Between Accreditation and School Improvement

5.1.1 A "Manifesto" for Accreditation

Mott clearly described his desire to develop a new, significantly different protocol in contrast to historic accreditation models offered by NEASC/CIE. Mott wanted a "manifesto", something that looked and sounded distinctive; something that was, according to Curtis, designed to help schools to "move past the check box mentality" of school compliance and to drive the transformation of the learning environment in ways that would be increasingly student centered. To achieve this, Mott and Curtis purposely set out to utilize language that looked and sounded very different from standard educational discourse. To illustrate an example of this, Mott (Anon. [pers. comm.] 21/012019) notes a "hobbyhorse of mine: I prefer the terms 'learning community' and 'learner' (in lieu of 'school' and 'student') in order to further emphasize the shift." At the time of the study, Curtis noted his belief that the protocol could have benefited from more clarification on the wording and structures, such as "the relationship between outputs and impacts." The design team considered sharing early drafts widely for feedback before launching the protocol, yet Mott rejected such an approach, as explained in the following theme.

5.1.2 The Importance of Independent Thinking

When reflecting upon the development of ACE, Mott referenced the Clayton Christensen book *Disrupting Class,* noting that "incumbent systems are not able to disrupt themselves. They need a disruptor to come along and lead to a point where the existing systems will ignore the disruptor at their own peril." Seeking to disrupt the traditional accreditation process, Mott purposefully kept the design team small and did not broadly circulate drafts as he argued doing so might "have improved but not changed the process." Mott referenced both Henry Ford's quote, "if I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses" (Walsh 2017) as well as Apple's lack of "market analysis testing" in support of his position. He indicated that a smaller group was beneficial to the work. He pulled together a group he trusted that was, "similar in thinking but with enough differences that it wouldn't become a 'yes man' group." Curtis also noted that the smaller design team was more "agile" than one turned over to the NEASC/CIE commission. That said, while Mott argued for a tight-group approach to the development of ACE, he hoped for a wider scope of influence for the application of the final product in order for ACE to generate systemic educational change.

5.1.3 Scope of Influence

Although Mott repeatedly articulated a desire to develop a new accreditation protocol that would help to transform educational practices for schools, he also noted potential limitations in this approach by stating that "it isn't enough for NEASC/CIE to do this. NEASC can't change education, we are not big enough or powerful enough to change education globally." Rather, Mott hoped

> "that as people look at ACE it will create a bit of an avalanche of similar approaches so that it doesn't become a maverick approach by this one organization, but rather becomes a more widespread accepted norm across organizations. A grassroots movement of sorts, that will lead to greater pressure - political, social, educational - all circles to create the momentum that will bring about the change that so much of us want and have been writing about in book after book."

Mott emphasized his position regarding the importance of this change by stating,

> "if medicine worked that way, we'd still be working with instruments from the 1950s, you'd run away. We have lots of research on how the brain works - but we are still using old tools. This is educational malpractice - how are we allowing that to happen? We need to say that it is not good enough. NEASC/CIE

> is a small cog, if others don't change then we have very little impact on education as a whole."

Mott hoped that the transformative experience for early adopters of the ACE protocol would be viewed positively, and indicated the need for, and conflicts of providing additional support to help schools successfully engage in the process.

5.1.4 Conflict of Interests Between Accreditation and School Support Services for the Completion of ACE

When considering the impact of ACE on schools, Mott noted that as schools move away from the compliance-based elements of the foundational standards towards the learning standards, "people might not know how to get there." Curtis reflected that early adopters of ACE would have benefitted from more school support, as well as more training and support for visiting teams, particularly around what "evidence" looks like. Following the launch of the protocol, NEASC/CIE engaged discussions exploring ways to provide ongoing support to schools, yet questions regarding potential conflicts of interest arose: could an organization provide support to schools while concurrently being the accreditor? Recognizing that organizations such as the International Baccalaureate maintain distinctive branches for support and authorization, NEASC/CIE began considering how to construct a "firewall between support services and accreditation services." At the time of the study, Mott noted that NEASC/CIE was "in the final stages of figuring this out about building the support arm [while] also looking at building relationships with other organizations to help build out professional support." Mott suggested the formation of a Research and Development department within NEASC/CIE to help build this support programming and "address different interpretations of how to approach change." Mott indicated a desire for a database of best practices to develop over time, which could be populated by exemplars gathered from learning principle reports, team visits, self-study findings, etc. The next section of this chapter provides a summary of the data emerging from learning principle reports for schools participating in this study.

5.2 Emerging Trends from Learning Principle Reports

To begin to understand the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools participating in ACE accreditation as well as the impact of the protocol on learning practices within the school towards transformational change, the study started with a review of each school's learning principle reports. The research specifically focused on the answers provided to the prompt asking schools to assess "where do we want to be - what impacts, outputs and inputs will demonstrate that your learning community has advanced on the Continuum? What will you have in place?" for each of

the ten learning principles. As described in chapter four, provisional coding was utilized to analyze the language employed by schools in answering the prompt into the three categories of inputs, outputs, and impacts as defined by Curtis. To help organize and visualize the data, the researcher summarized the data in terms of frequency of sentences matching the descriptor for each category. Organizing the data this way provided an opportunity to consider the degree to which a school overall spoke in the transformational language of impacts, as well as providing insight to language trends across learning principles or ACE domains. It should be noted that only six of the participating schools were provisionally coded against the ten learning principles as NEASC/CIE reformatted the learning principle report structure prior to South School A (SSA) embarking on the ACE protocol. The new format required schools to answer the same prompt, but against the Learning Architecture (A), Learning Culture (C), and Learning Ecology (E) domains of ACE rather than each learning principle individually. The averages for each school against the ten learning principles and the A, C and E domains can be found in Appendix G. A summary of Inputs:Outputs:Impacts results by school and overall is found in Table 10:

	Inputs							**Outputs**							**Impacts**						
Definition (McTighe & Curtis 2016)	*The actions, processes and resources needed to achieve desired outputs or impacts. Examples can include, but are not limited to funding streams, professional development opportunities, staff time allocation, etc.*							*The programs and structures needed to achieve desired impacts. Examples can include, but is not limited to curriculum maps, student programs, courses of study, etc.*							*The desired observable and measurable disciplinary or trans-disciplinary student learning outcomes as related to the mission. Examples can include, but are not limited to student, teacher and community statements about learning, metacognitive opportunities (self reflection, peer review), etc.*						
Schools	SSA	ESA	CSA	CWA	CSB	CSC	CWB	SSA	ESA	CSA	CWA	CSB	CSC	CWB	SSA	ESA	CSA	CWA	CSB	CSC	CWB
Individual School Averages	16%	5%	15%	27%	16%	59%	11%	64%	68%	52%	59%	64%	35%	71%	20%	26%	33%	14%	21%	6%	19%
Category Average	21%							59%							20%						

Table 11: Summary of Input:Output:Impact Results from Learning Principle Reports for Participating Schools

As noted in section 5.1.1, Mott and the design thinkers for ACE hoped the protocol would focus "a school's attention on learning impacts and places the understandings, aptitudes, dispositions, values, and competencies children need to develop to become successful and responsible citizens of the world at the heart of the accreditation process" (Mott 2016. p. 1). While the data do not

directly address the research questions insofar as they do not specifically capture school leadership's perception of educational transformation, it is interesting to consider how school leadership, supported by their in-school accreditation teams, discussed change against the ACE learning continuum via an important ACE tool: the learning principle report. Coding of reports indicated that the majority of statements in response to the prompt "where do we want to be - what impacts, outputs and inputs will demonstrate that your learning community has advanced on the Continuum? What will you have in place?" were categorized as outputs under Curtis' definition. The frequency of input- and impact-focused comments was similar. Some specific examples of comments in these categories included:

Inputs	● We are discussing and developing ideas that would develop the school's commitment to sustainability (CSA) ● The school would like to see more evidence of teacher collaborative team planning for this kind of teaching and learning (CSB) ● The governing body will increase their frequency of training and consider using external consultants or attending conferences to support their work in the school (ESA) ● We will have several PD workshops on standards-aligned assessments internal and with external consultant(s) to further support effective assessment of learning and reinforce effective assessment for learning practices (CWA) ● Team planning within the school week an additional time during June and August Summer Institute will be allotted… (CWB) ● A review of the budget to make sure we are allocating resources appropriately (CSC) ● ...teachers will continue to receive training to effectively create 21st century classrooms…(SSA)
Outputs	● Increase opportunities for service learning (CSA) ● Assessments will be thoroughly documented on Atlas (CSB) ● Our Advisory programme fully supports students socially and emotionally (ESA) ● Newly allocated and designed secondary library with modular furniture to promote collaboration and flexible learning spaces (CWA) ● Our curriculum tracking tool chosen by CWB, whether that be Rubicon Atlas or… will be used by all staff… to identify gaps in the curricula. (CWB) ● Interdisciplinary units in the MYP that crete meaningful links between the subjects for the students, as well as enhance the understanding of the content and concepts in each subject (CSC) ● We will work toward creating a consistent and timely institutional assessment cycle…(SSA)
Impacts	● Students report termly on how they have been 'caring', 'knowledgeable', etc. (CSA) ● Students will know themselves well enough as learners, to be the drivers of their own learning experiences and determine how they will share their own

	learning (CSB) ● Our graduates will be able to access a number of different pathways beyond ESA that match their particular needs, empowered with a portfolio that reflects their individual learning and strengths (ESA) ● Students use their Learning Portfolio (SeeSaw) to reflect on their own achievements, growth and goals. (CWA) ● ...student initiated advocacy regarding additional support or enrichment for our gifted students. (CWB) ● Ideally, as students progress through their academic levels they would develop increasing autonomy in goal setting. (CSC) ● We will know that the learning community is moving forward when learners are aware of their readiness to learn, set their learning goals, engage in their learning process, and self-evaluate their progress. (SSA)

Table 12: Examples of Input:Output:Impact Statements from Learning Principle Reports for Participating Schools

An understanding of how a school described itself in the learning principles report provided helpful context for the direct interviews conducted with school leaders, explored in the next section of this chapter.

5.3 Emerging Themes from Leadership Interviews

All schools participating in the study were asked to identify a school leader very familiar with the ACE protocol to participate in a 30-60 minute interview. Interview questions were designed to help explore the experience of the school with ACE and address the research questions of this study. Thematic analysis of the transcripts allowed the researcher to identify trends that schools reported regarding their experience with ACE. All schools shared similar experiences with ACE that were initially organized along a continuum of time. Step one of organizing the interview data involved grouping statements in this way: the experience of choosing to engage with ACE (*Electing ACE*), how the school experienced the process of institutionally organizing in order to complete the requirements of the protocol (*Organizing ACE*), their experience in grappling with the data generated by the ACE protocol and what they learned about themselves along the way during their self-examination (*Examining ACE*), and finally, their experience of planning for next steps once the protocol was completed (*After ACE*). The grouping of the data along the experiential timeline helped the researcher to later apply these themes directly to the research questions. The initial organization of the data along a continuum of time is found in Appendix H. The researcher then organized the emerging themes against the research questions. Selections of data that emerged, in the form of quotes from interview data, as aligned to the research questions are provided in the following table:

Research Question	Selection of Thematic Examples
1. What is the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools who have undertaken ACE accreditation protocol?	*Determining the driving factors for the selection of the ACE protocol* *For University Placement* ● We have a lot that apply to US colleges. You could argue that this makes it easier for applications. Because it's CIE that makes it easier for international students. (CSB) ● Parents look for it, especially if parents are looking for American colleges. (CSC) *For staff and student recruitment* ● We are the only trust-based non-profit, it's the school of choice for consulate employees, we want to make sure that this portion of our demographic's needs are met. (CSB) ● Also, gives credit to teachers we are trying to recruit from the US. (CSC) *Personal connection to NEASC/CIE* ● We have a close relationship with NEASC. The head of school is on the board. (CSB) ● Peter Mott has a number of connections [to education in this region], particularly with the ministry of education - having these connections is helpful. (CWA) *With the Mission and Vision* ● Now it's really about ACE, we feel they are very aligned with our framing of education. The ACE framework helped us to actualize what living our vision is. (ESA) ● Had early new documents and drafts of ACE, but it is in our mission to innovative so went for it. (CSA) *With the school strategic plan* ● They analyzed the ACE framework, it was very positive to see the high level alignment between [the strategic plan] and ACE, so it wasn't a huge problem in terms of alignment. As a follow up, we're taking the structure of ACE and using that for our strategic planning. (SSA) ● There was more of a conversation to determine how accreditation means something to us, how it aligns with our strategic planning process. (CSB) *Experience of organizing and completing ACE* *Scheduling/tactical approach* ● We divided up the report into ten teams for the ten principles and had a chair for each LP, this wasn't very top down at all. Chairs were Senior Leadership - we scheduled these meetings into the calendar so we were all learning about ACE together. We did this work prior to the NEASC LP visit. (CSC) ● We set aside whole professional learning days for this. Geared up the day before. Then spend 8 hours talking and focusing for the next 8 hours. Short but intensive bursts of energy. (CIS used to be dissipated and less effective) Really productive process that all bought into! (ESA) ● Involvement of other teachers happened after the LP visit. We had been inspected by the local governing agency in the first half of the year, so we didn't want to burn out the teachers. So mostly Senior Leadership Team at the Learning Principles [start]. (CWA) *Collaboration* ● The largest voice from teachers - they felt they had input in the process but it wasn't overwhelming and didn't take away their work from teaching and learning. Some people volunteered to be involved more. We worked with parents on strategic planning day (have this every year, this was focused on ACE this year). About 10 students were also involved. (CSB) ● For the self study - we identified a captain for each learning principle (mostly leaders). Each LP had ~15 K-12 teachers. Had about seven hour long sessions for each team. We used the guiding questions that NEASC sent as provocations to start or end each session. (CWA) ● We had a very distributed process (about 33 staff, some part time). We were able to take every learning principle and assign to three staff. Initial meeting for the ACE. The whole school wrote the report. It was really easy to get everyone involved. Even as a leadership team we reviewed the learning plan, edited a bit, but there was nothing wildly crazy and out of line. (CSA) *Clarification of ACE terminology* ● When we got the framework we were like, "whoa, what's this?", we liked the questions, it's all about the right things, but the language is very subjective. For example: working

	on it, etc., we were kind of stabbing in the dark… we had no mentor, there was no template, so we stabbing into the dark. (ESA) ● The ACE report, especially for a bilingual school is a VERY dense document. Very edu-jaron /edu-think. Took a number of meetings to try to figure out the words that didn't make sense in the learning principles (had 29 words). It was dense, it was an American document. [At the end], the jaron didn't pose a problem for everyone anymore. It was a greater PD tool for the school than the 8th Edition. The 8th felt like another version of CIS. (CWB) *Requests for NEASC/CIE support* ● Thinking of the framework as a teacher… if it was a new curriculum, you'd really need someone to explain this, someone to talk through this. If[we] struggled with this I can only imagine what other schools might struggle or be shocked with about the protocol. We struggled with this word [Impacts] a lot - had Darlene Fisher come and run a workshop on that. For the LP report we had a training with Jeff Bradley, and had Darlene Fisher work with us on impacts, and Trillium Hillaband, so that I could reach out to her with questions. (ESA) ● When I went to the training in London, I was told there was going to be a bank of exemplars, but I didn't see that. I think this would be VERY helpful for particularly bilingual schools. They do a good job of laying out thinking about it, working on it, living it… to see what different schools are doing at each of these stages…(CWB) *Needing to align with other organizations* ● We also had other accreditations happening with the joint visit. On other accreditations, ex. IB, we tried to think about how these aligned through the ACE lens… at first that was hard. (CSC) ● Members of the self study team led a big idea in the reports (IB/ACE/CIS) - ex Space and Resources. We identified "big buckets" any of the standards that fell under that bucket, I led the inquiry. Another one was well being and welfare. We would drive ourselves crazy if we were looking for those standards three or four times over for all the different reports. Then the community could choose three things and were assigned to a larger bucket. (ESA) *In comparison to previous experiences with accreditation* ● The old 8th was so bureaucratic, I never felt it drove school improvement, it was mutually beneficial, you get your badge and they get you through the process. Lots of disconnected committees in the large schools that I've worked with - quickly reverted to a box ticking exercise. "You're paying your dues, so you do this". (CSA) ● There were less checking boxes. For example - you're not talking about how quickly you could get out of the building in a fire drill. (CWA) ● Previous accreditation models were much more about jumping through hoops. When I looked at the 8th, it was just about getting the paper done. The 8th didn't give us leverage to move forward on what we wanted to focus on. (CSB)
2. How has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?	*Clarifying understanding of and identifying impacts on learning* *Discussions about learning* ● We enjoyed the ACE protocol. It had so many opportunities to discuss learning. You get to spend your time talking about learning which is the whole goal - that shift in emphasis and approach and that makes it meaningful, I would do it again. (CSA) ● Feedback [from NEASC] was "don't write as 'the school has, but the learners are…" we needed to not talk about the programs that we have but rather what the learners are doing. ACE changed the accreditation mindset to talk about what the learners were doing. (SSA) *Defining and aligning an understanding regarding 'impacts' on learning* ● We defined it [impacts] as "Active outcomes", things we could physically see, things that were moving us in the direction we wanted to go. The process of moving from point A to B. (CSB) ● We landed on the idea that impact was change or gain in learning. For example in piloting and development of the MYP interdisciplinary project… impacted results in the personal project. Traceable to an action. (SSA) *Collecting evidence on impacts on learning* ● The biggest struggle is the MEASURE on impact. It isn't something that is easily measured. (CWA) ● Collecting data on "impacts" - that was a question we had before, during and after the visit. Best we could come up with was collecting anecdotal evidence. Surveys of the

	community. Conversations with teachers… finding from them what they think the impact on students will be. I don't know that we have a definite answer on that. (CWA) ● [We had a] "data in a day" to do observations of classes against learning principles. At the end, we had four weeks, we had an "evidence" day - they submitted over 1000 pieces of evidence. (CSB)
	Data and measurement of impacts on learning
	Measuring where the community is currently at ● Data on the impact of learning for students is not yet available. They haven't executed on these items yet. (CSC) ● 50% [of what we have in place] is beyond aspirational. We're making things, but we're not at the stage of collecting data yet. So 0% of "living it" (CWB) ● I would define us as "working on it". We are a learning community in a constant process of growth. We have some things in place with data…. some with no data. We have things that we're thinking about, but we're trying to figure out how to get the data. (SSA) *Plans moving forward based on data collected* ● We have a high level of major learning plans...These will turn into proper management plans so that they can start action against, have accountability and how we will measure success and impact - but we're still continuing and developing that. It is hard to put measurement against impact, probably have to put more thought into it than an input or output. It is hard to explain to board re: financial/budget but we need to be able to show this so that you can show the value of this. (CSA) ● We ended up with 12 learning plans (strategic learning initiatives). Each of those is set up to collect data to ensure that we're moving in the direction we want to move. (CWA) ● We have all these things that we are doing and that we want to get data about. We don't have evidence of impacts. [When we received the] report from NEASC, [feedback] was to stop trying new things and innovating new things but to rather get more data on the impacts. We thought that we were not doing enough and NEASC was like, "relax and evaluate what we were doing already." (ESA)
3. To what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?	*Defining transformation*
	● Transformation is identity…. If it shakes up the image of the learner… changes our definition, or evolving/adapting the definition of that. (ESA) ● Transformation in the sense of understanding that the school is a learning community where each one of us is in a process of growth. (SSA)
	Transformational accomplishments to date
	For teachers/staff ● For me, transformational education starts with an individual teacher recognizing that something needs to be changed or morphed. It requires self reflection. I KNOW we've had more people looking at their own practice. (CWB) ● I do think this process has the potential to help transform school… there are conversations about transforming, rather than continuous improvement… I don't know if it's semantics, but I think that continuous change is transformation, it's moving from one thing into another. (CSB) ● We've changed the teaching rubric - now about 90% focused on teaching and learning, not 'are you on time?', 'wearing the right clothes?'. (CWB) *In the classroom/for learners* ● We heard from the preliminary visit… when I came had 25-30% of our classrooms actively engaged. When the ERV left, they reported approximately 60% of classrooms engaged. This was huge for 18 months! To hear words like "risk takers" in describing teaching and learning (ex. teachers saying "we're not really teaching inquiry, are we" and wanting to know what to do differently) is HUGE. This has driven conversations on how they can build risk into their classroom. That then leads to conversations about how well do you know your students? How can you encourage risk? So from my perspective we've grown a lot and this ACE, much more than the CIS model would have promoted. (CWB) ● The [ACE protocol] promotes transformative education… if you look at the

	continuum… it says: "what if"... it really makes you think about what if you tried something different. The process doesn't ensure transformation, but it allows the provocation to have the conversation towards it. It might depend on the school - it could be transformative for schools that are still sitting in rows. (CWA)
	The future of transformational learning
	• CSB is now looking at how they are going to parley the structures they built into ALL forward planning and communicate to all. (CSB) • In places we are living it. For example: teacher learning community (TLC) - each is assigned in a group on a topic they want to research. They meet regularly, research, put into place in the classroom, reflect on the outcome - they construct a portfolio throughout the year and share that with the learning administration - so that it is the only area that we feel we are living it rather than working on it. (SSA) • There are questions and pushback about whether or not we want to be as transformational as came out of the study. There has been lots of questions about our identity, what do we want to be. There are questions about whether or not we will do this process again. (CWB)

Table 13: Emerging Themes from School Leadership Interviews as Related to the Research Questions

Chapter five presented the data from this study as gathered from three major sources: direct interviews ACE design thinkers, learning principle reports, and direct interviews administrators of school participating in the protocol. Learning principle report data were organized through the Input:Output:Impacts frame as developed by Curtis. Schools wrote more frequently in the language of outputs while discussing inputs and impacts in nearly equal measure. Interview data from school administrators was coded and organized into emerging themes, first along a continuum of time and then against the research questions. The data from these three sources were analysed together against the research questions for this study. The results of this analysis and following conclusions are presented in chapter six.

Chapter Six: Data Analysis Against the Research Questions and Conclusions

Chapter six presents an analysis of the findings from all three data sources and conclusions in connection to the research questions for this study:

1. What is the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools who have undertaken ACE accreditation protocol?
2. How has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?
3. To what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?

The following is provided for each research question:

- ❏ *Internal analysis*: An analysis of the data generated by the study against the research question.
- ❏ *External analysis*: A summary of what existing research has stated against the research question.
- ❏ *Conclusions*: Concluding statements drawn from the internal analysis of data examined in light of related external research.

6.1 Internal Analysis of Research Question One: What is the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools who have undertaken ACE accreditation protocol?

As a new protocol recently unveiled to schools and piloted approximately two years prior to this study, the first research question explored the lived experience of the "first generation" schools participating in ACE as perceived by school administrators. Administrators in this study spoke holistically about the experience from the decision to elect into the protocol with NEASC/CIE to the completion of the learning principle reports, and in cases where the External Review Visit was completed, comments on the full process were provided. Feedback from administrators was organized into four major thematic areas that roughly followed a timeline experienced by most schools completing accreditation (Gallo and Woodward 2010, ACCJC/WASC, 2012, Coffey and Millsaps 2004): the decision to engage in a voluntary process with NEASC/CIE (Electing ACE), organization and building internal capacity to complete the task (Organizing ACE), self-reflection on the findings of the internal study (Examining ACE), and readiness for the next steps of the accreditation process (After ACE).

6.1.1 Findings Related to Electing ACE

All school administrators noted that their experience with ACE began with a consideration of whether or not to adopt this new protocol for their organization. For Mott and Curtis, the expectation was schools would opt into this protocol in order to leverage the accreditation process as a tool to drive whole-school transformation focused on the impact of learning on learners themselves. Although this desire was clearly articulated by some administrators in the election of ACE, administrators experienced the influence of other factors in their choice to pursue ACE with NEASC/CIE... specifically reputation, personal connections to NEASC, and alignment of ACE philosophy to institutional strategic goals. Six of the seven school administrators in this study commented on NEASC/CIE's reputation, particularly as an American accreditation body, as influential in the school choice to participate in ACE, specifically in the areas of university placement for students ("We [CSB] have a lot that apply to US colleges. You could argue that this makes it easier for applications."), recruitment for students and faculty ("...gives credit to teachers we [CSC] are trying to recruit from the U.S.") and the general perception of 'high quality education' found at NEASC/CIE schools ("We [CWB] feel that having accreditation is helpful, [that is the] perception… not sure if that has been proven with data"). At ESA, the connection to NEASC/CIE began well before the introduction to ACE: "The school was in a rocky position in its first few years for funding, there was a pull to have accreditation from a reputable organization." Three schools in this study named personal connections between the school and NEASC/CIE as influential in proceeding with ACE. Some connections were direct, as in the case of CSB where "the head of school is on the board" of NEASC/CIW. For CWS, the personal influence was part of a larger educational landscape as "Peter Mott has a number of connections [to education in this region], particularly with the ministry of education - having these connections is helpful - rather than WASC or Middle States…" Finally, six schools described how they experienced alignment between ACE and the mission or strategic planning for the school. After spending time considering the protocol, ESC stated, "now it's really about ACE, we feel they are very aligned with our framing of education; The ACE framework helped us to actualize what living our vision is." At SSS

> "we analyzed the ACE framework, it was very positive to see the high level alignment between [the strategic plan] and ACE, so it wasn't a huge problem in terms of alignment. As a follow up, we're taking the structure of ACE and using that for our strategic planning."

As CSB considered the development of a strategic plan "focused on learning", they aligned closely with the idealized expectations stated by Mott and Curtis "because the conversation in

ACE is related to learning, it was helpful to us to be useful for strategic planning." All that said, many of the schools participating in this study also maintain accreditation or authorization by other national and international entities. Despite feeling the alignment of ACE was beneficial to internal programming planning, some schools experienced challenges when attempting to fit the ACE protocol alongside requirements from other organizations. For example, CSC "had other accreditations happening with the joint visit. On other accreditations, ex. IB, we tried to think about how these aligned through the ACE lens… at first that was hard." ESA tackled this challenge by having

> "members of the self study team led a big idea in the reports [IB/ACE/CIS] ... We identified "big buckets" any of the standards that fell under that bucket, I led the inquiry ... We would drive ourselves crazy if we were looking for those standards three or four times over for all the different reports. Then the community could choose three things and were assigned to a larger bucket."

The experience for CWB, who "merged CIS/IB/ACE...and ran a joint CIS/ACE/IB wasn't super collaborative."

6.1.2 Findings Related to Organizing ACE

Each school developed its own unique way of logistically organizing and completing the learning principles report, yet there appeared to be some notably similar experiences between the schools in this study. For example, six schools spoke at length about their experience with unpacking the language of the ACE protocol as a critical early step in engaging the process. For example, CSC "had a lot of pre-work to ensure that we understood the language. It was different, it was important we had to be on the same page" and the community at SSA "took some time to figure out the language of ACE - [for example defining] Learner, Self directed learning definitions, etc... at first we needed to understand the framework, we unpacked that." Despite the fact that all schools received a professional development workshop as part of their foundation visit to help clarify next steps in the construction of the learning principle report, multiple schools noted a need for continued support directly from NEASC as they sought to understand the language of the protocol and the expectations for final products. Clarification of terminology was an emerging theme in each research question and more examples of how this related to both the consideration of learning impacts and transformational change can be found in later sections of this chapter. As if anticipating that schools would experience some challenges with the language of ACE, Curtis noted in the interview for this study that the protocol would have benefited from more clarification on the wording, particularly around explaining "the relationship between outputs and impacts."

All administrators described their schools as engaging in a collaborative approach towards the completion of the ACE stages, often in contrast to their experience with other or previous accreditations. In order to create collaborative spaces, school administrators structured professional development time strategically to provide many opportunities for various stakeholders to work together. CSB "built ACE planning time into the PD calendar" as did CSC where the administrators

> "divided up the report into ten teams for the ten principles and had a chair for each learning principle, this wasn't very top down at all. Chairs were senior leadership, we scheduled these meetings into the calendar so we were all learning about ACE together."

ESA set "aside whole professional learning days for this. Gear up the day before... CIS used to be dissipated and less effective... [This was a] really productive process that all bought into!" Due to additional inspection requirements, CWA began the construction of the learning principles report only with senior leadership and "involvement of other teachers happened after the LP visit. We had been inspected by the local governing agency in the first half of the year, so we didn't want to burn out the teachers." The scheduled professional collaboration time appeared to be received positively by school administrators. "We [at CSA] enjoyed the ACE protocol. It had so many opportunities to discuss learning. You get to spend your time talking about learning which is the whole goal." The CSC administrator appreciated how the protocol

> "brought together different people to look at how we are going to change our practices. For the people who have joined these teams, who've never done this before. [This is] probably are already having an impact. This time felt a lot more inclusive of the whole school. I have only had one previous accreditation with NEASC. Under 8th, our lower school head pulled the whole paper together."

The CWB administrator noted a similar comparative experience where "before the teams had been small, mostly administration, heads of departments, and this time everyone had a chance to participate." Although CSB's administrator reflected positively on the overall collaborative experience, multiple participants in the process also yielded challenges that shaped his approach over time with the ACE protocol.

> "Practically, I'm not as proud of the learning principle as the external review report. The learning principle report was all over the map with style… we went back and reviewed, got better, but still lots of different voices, I went back and read through to have common style. For the ERV I hired a writer to help, gave bulleted ideas to the writer. She gave them the content for the teams to edit."

The SSA administrator took a similar approach to address this issue of 'voice' in the construction

of collaboratively generated report, with the exception that he "received all of the reports and was in charge of writing the first draft of the paper to NEASC."

6.1.3 Findings Related to Examining ACE

As a designer of ACE, Curtis hoped that the protocol would allow schools to experience movement beyond "move past the check box mentality" of compliance that had existed in previous accreditation models so that the internal reflection phase could be increasingly focused on learner impacts with a de-emphasis on attention to inputs and outputs. The direct result of the internal reflection, the learning principle reports, indicated that on average schools utilized impact-aligned in 20% of written comments.

All administrators participating in the study noted various ways that the ACE protocol shaped their reflections on their schools and how these reflections centered upon learning within their community. CWA perceived "the biggest benefit of the process was having whole school conversations about how we are approaching learning at different phases of our school; It was more about the discussion around learning, where we could take it to be more transformative." Guidance from NEASC/CIE encouraged the administration at SSA not to "write as 'the school has, but the learners are…'. We needed to not talk about the programs that we have but rather what the learners are doing. ACE changed the accreditation mindset to talk about what the learners were doing." SSA's administrator went on to explain how this shift resonated well with the community as, "previous versions of accreditation caused stress, teachers are not the main focus, it is on the students. The teachers knew that ACE was coming to look at what the students were doing." In order to more closely examine what learners were doing, CSB worked to compile evidence of student thinking in action through various means by having faculty collect samples (video, pictures) of students and to "do observations of classes against learning principles. At the end, we had four weeks, we had an 'evidence' day - they submitted over 1000 pieces of evidence." The degree to which these reflective conversations centered on learning impacts or transformative experiences for the community is considered in research questions two and three.

The process of self-reflection and school examination was described as notably different from other accreditation protocols by all school administrators in the study. Although not all schools reported SSA's experience of feeling less stress, most pointed to a diminished emphasis on compliance-centered reflections. A decreased focus on the language of compliance could be seen in the learning principle reports where 21% of all written comments in the learning principle

reports were categorized as input-aligned. Even though CSA had not been previously accredited by NEASC/CIE, the administrator had served on numerous teams prior to ACE, reflecting that

> "the old 8th was so bureaucratic, I never felt it drove school improvement. It was mutually beneficial, you get your badge and they get you through the process. Lots of disconnected committees in the large schools that I've worked with - quickly reverted to a box ticking exercise. You're paying your dues, so you do this."

CWA used nearly identical language to describe the difference stating, "there were less checking boxes. For example - you're not talking about how quickly you could get out of the building in a fire drill." Changing the metaphor slightly, CSB noted "previous accreditation models were much more about jumping through hoops. When I looked at the 8th, it was just about getting the paper done. The 8th didn't give us leverage to move forward on what we wanted to focus on." While not a focal area of this report, schools engaging in joint accreditations during the time of the study commented on the challenging experience of attempting to align the ACE protocol with other organizations for joint visits. CSB's administrator "tried to think about how [the IB self-study] aligned through the ACE lens, at first that was hard. We created a website to cross walk evidence, for example IB shared impacts… IB standards and practices against [ACE] learning principles." ESA organized into teams that explored the " big idea in the [IB/ACE/CIS] reports, for example, Space and Resources… We would drive ourselves crazy if we were looking for those standards three or four times over for all the different reports." In a similar process to ESA, CWB organized their school into ten teams aligned with the learning principles, but found that they "had to really work to connect everyone" during the joint visit between NEASC/CIE, CIS, and the IB, noting in the end that it "wasn't super collaborative."

6.1.4 Findings Related to After ACE

At the conclusion of the learning principle stage - and in some cases, the external review team - school administrators had multiple reflections on their accomplishments to date and questions regarding both the future of their schools and the future of ACE. Multiple schools ended the ACE self-study with questions regarding the structural elements necessary to support future work. For example, CSB was "looking at how [they] are going to parley the structures they built into ALL forward planning and communicate to all", and CSC ended the process with "a high level of major learning plans… These will turn into proper management plans so we they can start action against, have accountability, and measure success and impact - but we're still continuing and developing that." CSA anticipated a multi-year plan where year one would focus on identifying "existing practices that make learning visible and identify opportunities that would increase the visibility of learning… to explore how learning might be made visible in real and virtual space"

and year two would see the school "embed new models into practice and reflect and adapt as appropriate to ensure that the process is institutionalised with supporting documentation, through digital communications protocols, and possibly through timetabling, staffing, resourcing, etc…" The SSA administrator focused on the challenges of data collection against new learning initiatives stating that "we have some things in place with data…. some with no data. We have things that we're thinking about, but we're trying to figure out how to get the data." During their interviews, both Mott and Curtis noted that providing schools with examples of how to collect and organize the data necessary for ACE would be beneficial and they directly recommended NEASC/CIE consider the construction of a 'database' of best practices that could be populated by exemplars gathered from learning principle reports, team visits, self-study findings, or schools themselves.

A few schools anticipated that the ACE protocol would be easier when they engage the process again in five years. The CSB administrator noted that "this was an incredible amount of work, perhaps because we were building the plane as flying it. [It] should get easier as more schools understand what they are doing." That said, there was not a universal assumption that a school would engage in the ACE process in the future.

> "I do think it has been a tool to move us [CWB] forward...There are questions and pushback about whether or not we want to be as transformational as came out of the study. There has been lots of questions about our identity, what do we want to be. There are questions about whether or not we will do this process again."

The CWA administrator did not comment on the future of ACE at their school, however, she did "wonder how other schools are approaching the ACE framework, I'm curious to see if it gains traction. I'm super interested in seeing how schools engage in the framework, if this is going to take root. I'm interested to see where it goes...to show changes as NEASC/CIE gets feedback."

6.2 External Analysis of Research Question One

While no known studies regarding the experience of schools participating in the ACE protocol were available at the time of this study, multiple studies exist regarding the experience of schools participating in NEASC accreditation. Although these studies do not specifically follow the same organizational frame as presented in this study, commentary regarding the themes - electing, organizing, examining, and after - accreditation can be found in multiple places in the literature.

6.2.1 Research Related to Electing ACE

In his study on the experience of NEASC accreditation in New Hampshire public schools,

Cushing (1999) surveyed school board members, superintendents and principals on their "perceptions and attitudes of the respondents toward the accreditation status granted by the NEASC" (p. 76). Despite indications from his data "that all groups value the accreditation status granted by NEASC" (p.79), there appeared to be different reasons underpinning the value associated by the different subgroups. For principals, the positive response was related to the process of accreditation, superintendents appeared to focus on obtaining accreditation status in order to positively validate their schools in the public sphere, and school board members did not appear to understand the process of accreditation (p. 78). Fairman et al. (2009) found similar results in their research on the perception of school leaders in Maine regarding the benefits of NEASC accreditation where superintendents in that study also believed "the accreditation process provides information to the broader community about the quality of the school and helps to maintain a positive public perception of the school" (p. 36).

Although NEASC/CIE states clearly on the published informational materials for ACE that the goal is for schools to opt into this protocol as a means to transformation, it appears that the organization is aware that schools continue to be motivated to engage in the accreditation process as a result of the importance of public perception regarding accreditation status, particularly with their organization. Evidence for this is found in recent article by Bradley (2018) where he writes:

> "The recent proliferation of international schools has increased pressure on schools new and old to demonstrate their distinctiveness and to be recognized. Accreditation by NEASC or any agency confers on schools a brand - some call it a badge - that sends a clear message to its own community and to the "marketplace" of prospective families that the school has met important requirements and merits recognition. From a brand perspective, NEASC itself is fortunate to trace its lineage back to 1885 and the nascent efforts of Harvard University President Charles Eliot and others to establish standards for secondary schools as members of the "New England Association" (p. 38).

Finally, the benefits of being 'branded' as a U.S. accredited school are meaningful. "The nature of accreditation as a voluntary process has changed over the years. A review of the recent evolution of regional accreditation reveals a transition from an initially voluntary nature to one that is increasingly mandatory" (Lubinescu et al. 2001, p. 11), particularly for reasons related to funding. In their discussion of accreditation in higher education, Kinser and Lane (2017) note that "legitimacy through quality assurance [such as NEASC] is often necessary to make the institution eligible for government support or to endorse a program as a worth destination for students" (p. 9). Although the studies by Lubinescu et al. and Kinser and Lane are focused on

higher education, they raise relevant issues for secondary education, particularly as all of the schools in this study were independent schools relying heavily on student fees, and as such, presenting as a 'worthy destination for students' can have significant financial implications! Beyond simply "assuring a basic level of quality and improving quality" (Kanter & Soo 2015), Brittingham (2009) lists some of the additional commonly acknowledged benefits as "access for students to federal financial aid, legitimacy with the public, a ticket to listings in guides to college admissions, consideration for foundation grants and employer tuition credits, reflection and feedback from a group of peers, and keeping the government at arm's length through a self-regulatory process" (p. 18).

6.2.2 Research Related to Organizing ACE

Section 6.1.2 highlighted feedback from administrators participating in this study as experiencing a high level of collaboration amongst faculty in order to complete the ACE protocol. This experience appeared to be significant to them as it contrasted against what they had experienced in previous, different accreditation cycles where full-faculty participation was less prevalent. That said, when it comes to the organization of the self study, a featured component in US accreditation, it is notable that multiple accreditation studies (Stump, et. al 2013, Fairman, et al, 2009), including Cushing's study (1999), listed the ability of the NEASC accreditation to bring "the faculty together to reflect on practices and react to NEASC standards, as a very important part of the process" (p. 114). In fact, Eaton (2011) explains in her overview of U.S. accreditation that it specifically "depends heavily on faculty… who voluntarily participate in self studies" (p. 3-4). Participants in a study of NEASC accreditation within high schools in Maine conducted by Fairman et al. (2009) stated the "most significant benefit [of the accreditation process] was the self-reflection and review of the self-study [because it provided] time and a structure for teachers to take a deeper look at what they do [which] is not something that might occur during the normal school day, or that teachers would engage in on their own given the endurance of isolation in teaching practice" (p. 34). These positive experiences speak to the multiple benefits outlined by Nevo (2009) for teacher participation in school evaluation activities including "involvement in the decision making process outside of the classroom, [fostering] collegiality and collaboration amongst the teachers, [and serving] as a means for promoting reflection" (p. 6) and overall professionalization of the teaching role.

There is also evidence in the research that aligns with what administrators in this study on ACE shared regarding their experiences with a lack of collaboration during the completion of non-ACE accreditation models. For example, participants at some schools in the study by

Fairman et al. (2009) "noted that where veteran teachers tightly controlled the self-study process and did not seriously engage in a critical self-review, the usefulness of the self-study and the NEASC report were more limited, as they described current practices rather than goals for improvement" (p. 35).

6.2.3 Research Related to Examining ACE

Much has been published to summarize or explain the language encountered as part of the accreditation process. Some of these publications, such *A Handbook to Guide Educational Institutions Through the Accreditation Process* (Coffey and Millisaps 2004), are intended as instruction manuals to support schools in obtaining accreditation and contain explanations of key terminology to support the process. Other publications (Fertig 2015, Fairman, et al. 2009, Flynn 1997, Cushing 1999, Raccio 2012) zoom in on particular areas of research, but also include useful summaries regarding the 'language of accreditation' in their background or literature reviews. Fertig (2015) notes that while there are "some significant differences in the ways in which organizations have understood and defined the concept of 'accreditation' [which] in their turn, have implications both for understanding the underlying agenda behind the process and, also, for the practice of the educational institution under the spotlight" (p. 3), yet challenges of unpacking the language of accreditation were not evident in research on the experience of other schools participating in NEASC accreditation. This apparent lack of confusion for schools participating in non-ACE accreditations stand in stark contrast to the experience of schools participating in this study. As noted in sections 6.1.2 and 6.1.3, schools in this study struggled to unpack the language of ACE in order to understand what they were required to examine internally and in turn present within their learning principle papers and as evidence to the visiting teams.

In his unpublished paper, Eaton (2016) attributes this density of language directly to the work of the ACE design team, whom he describes as hailing from "some of the world's most elite, established and traditional international schools" (p. 20) who deliver the protocol "to potential constituents who discover ACE requires one to submit to a unique brand of 'Newspeak'. A limited glossary of 'Key ACE Terms' is included, but this alone is deficient when seeking to grasp ACE's newfangled lexicon" (p. 15). An example of the density of ACE's language from "A Brief Glossary of Key ACE Terms" (NEASC/CIE 2017) is illustrated in the definition of 'strategic planning', a phrase that is referenced multiple times by administrators in this study, versus 'future design', a term that did not appear in the coded learning principle reports or during interviews:

> "Traditional Strategic Planning often begins with an analysis of the learning community's current situation, proposes goals intended to improve upon the present, and leads to the development of a set of actions over a period of 3-5 years. On the other hand, Future Design begins by examining the drivers of change, then imagines a preferred future and articulates goals aligned with the learning community's raison d'être – learning. Future Design eschews long-range action planning in favor of more agile, nimbler strategies that are refined and adapted regularly based on evidence of success and desired modifications of the organization's preferred future" (p. 26).

The data presented regarding how schools examined themselves in the light of ACE did not only uncover difficulties with language, but also challenges with how to capture evidence of the impact of educational offerings on learners. The question of 'how' to assess emerges in the writing of Lubinescu et al. (2001) where the authors note that schools must find a

> "way to describe student learning from the many possible choices. The methods and measures selected should describe and differentiate excellent, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory performance. The criteria and measures selected often imply a method of data collection as well as integrating assessments from out-of-class experiences and in-class experiences, which can yield better judgments about what a particular student is learning than relying on one measure (Ewell, 1983). Also, it may be useful to incorporate both traditional and nontraditional assessment measures, such as interviews, self-judgment of one's own learning, and practical skills tests" (p. 16).

Of course, once sufficient methods are identified for capturing data, schools must grapple with their next steps once the self-study and accreditation visit are completed.

6.2.4 Research Related to After ACE

Few studies in the literature address the experience of schools receiving accreditation feedback from NEASC or how a school tackled the next steps following the conclusion of the self-study and external review. The study by Fairman et al. (2009) captured the data of 11 schools in Maine regarding their experience of receiving and reacting to recommendations from a NEASC accreditation visit. In the summary of feedback from these schools, it appeared that the schools focused their post-accreditation work on issues related to output-aligned actions such as updating facilities, staffing and scheduling, revisions to mission statements, assessment practices and curricula. The challenges of the next steps for the schools accredited by NEASC in Maine appear to be very different from the challenges cited by the schools accredited under the ACE protocol.

As such, NEASC/CIE may benefit from a consideration of supports as outlined by Simmons (2002) involving the "pairing of schools" for the purposes of professional consultation and the organization of a "consortia of schools" to "build up a cumulative evaluation knowledge base" (p. 32).

The fact that not all administrators in this study were certain if their school would engage the process again warrants consideration. The question of continuation with ACE was raised specifically by CWB, located in a country where schools are subject to high levels of governmental oversight. An explanation for this may be found in the work of Kinser and Lane (2017) who argue that the high degree of trust necessary for the faculty of a school to candidy identify and share areas for improvement as part of the accreditation self-study may be "difficult to export ... to other countries, particularly in the countries were administrators have significant authority and discretion over faculty; setting up a system whereby administrators may not be fully transparent in the self-study process and faculty have little recourse to challenge administrative claims that they may disagree with" (p. 17).

6.3 Conclusions Regarding Research Question One. Three conclusions are drawn from the internal and external analysis of the data regarding the experience of participating schools.

6.3.1 Conclusion #1: Schools were motivated to be accredited by NEASC/CIE, but not solely for reasons related to the goals of ACE.

It was clear from interview data that schools participating in this study valued accreditation status by NEASC/CIE. The conversations held with administrators regarding the decision of their schools to elect ACE do not appear to differ significantly from reasons in favor of accreditation stated by administrators in other studies found in the literature. Six of the seven participating schools indicated that NEASC/CIE membership served an important purpose for the school beyond leveraging ACE as a tool to promote school growth. Administrators at ESE and SSA both explicitly referenced the integrity of the NEASC/CIE "brand" as a valuable commodity which was, or had been, important for their schools to be connected with. Other schools, such as CSB, CSC, CWA and CWB all noted the importance of maintaining an "American" accreditation, and their historic or local educational-political connections with NEASC/CIE may have influenced the decision to maintain membership through ACE protocol change. Reasons for maintaining an American brand varied from meeting the perceived needs of current or prospective families, assisting in the recruitment of faculty, and aiding in the application process for U.S. universities. It may not be surprising, given the historically unique placement of U.S. accreditation, that CSA

was the only school not to have explicitly noted a desire for NEASC/CIE accreditation. The administrator noted, that as a new school, the ACE protocol appeared to be the best tool for supporting and crystalizing their previously drafted strategic plan, thus driving their decision to pursue the protocol rather than accreditation via a different organization such as the Council of International Schools (CIS).

6.3.2 Conclusion #2: The ACE protocol promotes adult collaboration.

Administrators at all schools commented on the collaborative approach they experienced with the ACE protocol at their respective schools. Multiple administrators, particularly those as CSA, CSB and CWA, noted this approach in contrast to a more centralized or leadership-driven approach historically maintained at their schools or in their previous accreditation experiences under the 8th Edition. The shift towards greater collaboration may result from the perceived movement away from compliance-centered conversations from previous accreditation models to a learner-centered approach. Even though the ACE protocol does contain compliance-based elements, these are focused on the foundation standards, a report that is submitted prior to engaging in work against the learning principles as seen in Figure 2. This may open more space, or a perception of increased space, for collaborative non-compliance based conversations.

That said, while it is possible to conclude that participants in this study perceived the ability of the ACE protocol to promote adult collaboration in a meaningful way, this experience cannot be uniquely attributed to ACE. Multiple studies on NEASC accreditation listed in section 6.2.2 also noted the strength of the general, non-ACE accreditation process to create meaningful collaborative opportunities for professional dialogue. As such, further study is needed to know if the collaboration experienced by participants in the ACE protocol is a unique to ACE, or a function of the organizational structures deployed by school leadership towards the completion of the self-study which, should administrators elect to organize this way, could be applied to any accreditation model.

6.3.3 Conclusion #3: The language and structure of ACE presents difficulties and schools require additional support.

Across all of the research questions, school administrators described difficulty in their experience of unpacking and understanding the language of the ACE protocol. Most schools utilized a process of early retreats or workshops with either senior leadership or full-faculty to develop an understanding of the learning principles, as well as to define inputs, outputs, impacts, and any other relevant terminology in the context of their schools. Multiple schools leveraged support via

NEASC/CIE to help construct an understanding of the terminology of ACE. Bilingual schools described the language of the protocol as "dense" and full of "edu-jargon" (CWB). The experience of schools in this study is somewhat unsurprising given the NEASC/CIE website specifically notes that "ACE challenges the familiar language and 'grammar' of schooling and encourages 'schools' to become learning communities guided by a razor-sharp vision of learning in our times" (NEASC 2019). In the end, it is noteworthy that many, but not all, administrators in this study felt their teams were ultimately successful in unpacking, understanding and moving forward within the language of ACE. Data from the learning principle reports are inconclusive to support the notion that shifts in the language of the ACE protocol yield a greater focus on learning impacts for students given that only 20% of statements in the reports presented impact-aligned language.

To aid in developing a greater understanding of ACE - in terms of process, terminology and outcomes - all schools participating in the study leaned into direct support from NEASC/CIE. This support came in the form of on-site workshops as well as sending members of staff to be trained for the hosting ACE visit or to become ACE visitors. Perhaps recognizing this challenge, a workshop facilitated by ACE visitors is built into each learning principle visit to assist schools in deeping their understanding as they transitioned into the next phase of the self-study. NEASC/CIE may be of greater support to schools if they adopted the suggestions of Simmons (2002) to organize professional learning communities of schools engaged in the ACE protocol so that schools could support each other. In addition to receiving support in understanding ACE terminology, school administrators expressed a desire for exemplars to better visualize what may constitute "working on it', "living it," "what if…" on the learning continuum against the learning principles. Such clarification would also help support schools as they work to implement the learning plans that emerged as a result of the self-study. Finally, schools in this study would also benefit from support on how to capture the appropriate data necessary to gauge the impact of these learning plans on students.

6.4 Internal Analysis of Research Question Two: How has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?

As stated on the NEASC/CIE website (2018), "ACE's conceptual shift moves accreditation from an input/output-oriented model to creating a learning eco-system, which looks for impact of learning on the learner." School administrators were able to provide specific ways in which ACE learning practices, although impact-based language was utilized less frequently than input/output-based language in learning principle reports for all schools.

Three focal areas emerged as administrators considered the impact on learning practices:

- Need for clarification of terminology necessary to focus and align on the impact of learning practices,
- Challenges for data collection methods on learning practices, and
- Utilization of evidence-based approaches for understanding learning impacts within a school

6.4.1 Need for clarification of terminology.

All schools participating in the study indicated a need to define 'impact of learning' prior to identifying how ACE impacted learning practices within the school. ESA administrator noted that "when we got the framework we were like 'Whoa, what's this?' - we liked the questions… it's all about the right things… but the language is very subjective." Schools tackled this process in different ways, some like CSC starting with leadership retreats to develop understanding before opening the conversation with the wider community, and others such as CSA started unpacking terminology within full-faculty ACE working groups. Additionally, all schools except CSA noted that they required support directly from NEASC/CIE to unpack or confirm their understanding of ACE terminology. The ESA administrator also highlighted the degree to which the language of ACE provided a barrier for engaging in the process:

> "If NEASC wants to bring people along in this model there needs to be some coaching or mentoring, even if not via NEASC, but somehow connected with others. Because it is so drastically different, some coaching or mentoring around the key ideas would be helpful, then people could really focus on the transformation piece and not struggle with 'what do we do with this?', 'do you think this means what I think this means?'. It's fine to send the framework, but it needs some human connection. Jeff Bradley came and did the Learning Principles workshop AND the training for our staff to be visitors, so we were lucky, we had lots of support."

Schools defined impact in a variety of ways, but most held a similar theme of change. For example, ESA defined it as "the process of moving from point A to B. We landed on the idea that impact was change or gain in learning… [Something that was] traceable to an action." This was similar to CSA's definition of "active outcomes, things we could physically see, things that were moving us in the direction we wanted to go."

6.4.2 Challenges for data collection

In coded sections across the ten learning principles, language used in all reports indicated that schools spoke most frequently (59%) in terms of outputs, defined as programs and structures currently in place to support learning. In interviews, school administrators noted challenges with capturing and reporting data on the impact of programs and structures on student learning. "It is hard to put measurement against impact," noted an administrator from CSC, "[we] probably have to put more thought into it than an input or output. Hard to explain impacts to the board for financials or budget… [but we] needed to be able to show this so that you can show the value of this." In the case of ESA, NEASC/CIE provided guidance to help schools focus on data collection towards learning impacts: "The report from NEASC was to stop trying new things and innovating new things but to rather get more data on the impacts. We thought that we were not doing enough and NEASC was like 'relax and evaluate' what we were doing already." CWA recounted that when it came to "collecting data on impacts, that was a question we had before, during and after the visit. Best we could come up with was collecting anecdotal evidence. Surveys of the community, conversations with teachers and finding from them what they think the impact on students will be. I don't know that we have a definite answer on that."

6.4.3 Utilization of evidence-based approaches

As schools crystallized their understanding of what learning impacts looked like in their spaces, some developed concrete methods for capturing the data based on observable evidence in or on learners. As noted earlier, CSB worked to collect evidence of student impacts leading to "an 'evidence' day - they [the faculty] submitted over 1000 pieces of evidence." To get there CSB had teachers "go out and do what the [NEASC/CIE] visitors were going to do. [They held a] 'Data in Day' to capture pictures, etc., to drive our reflections. Data against this [Learning Impacts] is anecdotal at the moment. There is a process, it's qualitative, getting feedback from teachers, videoing lessons and interviewing kids ('what are you learning? how does this connect to previous learning?'). The media team is documenting events in brief cool ways - it's helpful in painting a picture in what we were after."

A few school administrators provided evidence of specific learning impacts. CWA's administrator shared that "student-initiated action was one we came back to the most. We could point to that. We could show that students could feel confident and empowered to start their own clubs, etc… That was easier to observe rather than the attitudes that students might have." When asked if the ACE protocol impacted or altered learning practices within your school, CWB enthusiastically responded, "YES! We heard from the preliminary visit [when they came we] had

25-30% of our classrooms actively engaged. When the external review visit left, they reported about 60% of classrooms engaged. This was huge for 18 months!"

Finally, even when schools were able to name a few learner practices that already had changed with supporting data, most schools identified that their answers to the prompt in the learning principles report "where do we want to be - what impacts, outputs and inputs will demonstrate that your learning community has advanced on the Continuum? What will you have in place?" was currently aspirational. Schools stated they were working to have new programs, or they may have outputs in place that could be driving learning impacts, but data, or systems to collect data, were not yet available. CWB illustrated this point by sharing that "50 percent [of what is in place] is beyond aspirational. We're making things, but we're not at the stage of collecting data yet [so we're at] 0% of living it."

6.5 External Analysis of Research Question Two

An interesting comparison can be made between administrator responses to the research questions of this study, "how has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?" against the question "what impact has the NEASC process had on your high school?" (p. 93) posed by Cushing (1999) to school administrators in Maine. In Cushing's study 94% (N=36) of school principals responded positively regarding the impact of NEASC accreditation within their schools. In open-ended responses "some of the impact of the accreditation process found among principals' responses were: school improvement, self evaluation, validation of the work being done at the school, sense of pride, collaboration between staff members, improved budget requests, and resolving facility issues" (p. 95). Cushing goes on to say, "by far the most consistent impact noted among principals centered around school improvement. One response, in particular, which summed up the feelings of many principals was, "the process provides an opportunity to 'step back' and examine professional practices, philosophies, goals, etc. to hold what we do and why we do it up to the light of reality" (p. 96). While specific details regarding goals, practices, etc., are not provided in Cushing's published material, the language of principals in the study do not directly refer to the benefits of accreditation in ways that are specifically related to learners.

It is not necessarily surprising that the schools participating in the ACE protocol encountered difficulty in identifying ways to capture the impact of the educational environment on learners. In the U.S., the evolution of methods to capture student performance data was heavily influenced by the need to capture such data for measurement and accountability purposes in alignment with

programs such as NCLB (Rothstein et al. 2008, McKenzie & Kress 2015). Standardized testing results became the metric *du jour* for schools to analyze the impact of an educational program on learners. Unfortunately, many of the tests used in the U.S. do not have the ability to assess elements of ACE represented in the learning principles. SAT scores may demonstrate proficiency in math, but will not uncover if "learners demonstrate understandings, competencies, knowledge, dispositions, and values that will allow them to become responsible and successful citizens" (NEASC/ACE 2016). To address this gap "accreditation teams should [supplement their reports] by examining student work, listening to student performances, observing student behavior, and interviewing students to gain insight into their knowledge and skills (Rothstein et al. 2008. p. 155). Given that data historically used for school accountability in the U.S. did not focus on these types of impacts, new tools to capture learning impacts must be developed by schools in order for ACE to be successful. Bae's (2018) research on resdesigning school accountability systems may offer insight as to how a "a new system of accountability should include the use of multiple measures that provide a holistic view of a student's learning and progress and goes beyond standardized test scores of English language arts (ELA) and math" through the use of "data dashboards" (p.3).

6.6 Conclusions Regarding Research Question Two

Two conclusions are drawn from the internal and external analysis of the data regarding how has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools.

6.6.1 Conclusion #4: The ACE protocol directs a focus on learning.

All school administrators participating in the study spoke about the degree to which the ACE protocol focused organizational conversations on learners and learning. In the case of CSB, ACE helped to embed learning at the core of their strategic plan: "We have a strategic plan, and it needed to be focused on learning. Because the conversation in ACE is related to learning, it was helpful to us for the strategic planning". Another example is found at CWB where they actively changed teacher evaluation rubrics to be more "focused on teaching and learning". Evidence of a focus on learning-directed outputs can also be seen in the data from learning principle reports in Tables 11 and 12.

There appears to be a difference in the language utilized by principals in Cushing's study regarding the impact of accreditation versus the language of administrators in this study on ACE. In a very limited way, this may also support the conclusion that the ACE protocol, whether by

language, process, or both, does meaningfully focus school self-study conversations on learners and learning. That said, the differences in the language and phrasing of the research questions between this and the Cushing study will influence the emergent data and should be considered with appropriate skepticism.

6.6.2 Conclusion #5: Curation of an evidence-rich dataset facilitates an understanding of the impact of ACE on learning practices.

In conclusion #3 administrators commented on the difficulty of understanding and communicating within the language of ACE. That said, administrators with greater clarity regarding the impact of ACE on learning practice referenced specific data sets uniquely curated to both compile information and understand the data contextually. This method of data collection, presentation and analysis differs from widely-held analysis methods focused on student outcomes such as standardized test scores. Specific examples of evidence-rich datasets included:

- SSA: Faculty are organized into a "Teacher Learning Community (TLC)" where faculty are organized into groups based on educational practices they want to research. From there, teachers "meet regularly, research, put into place in the classroom, reflect on the outcome - they construct a portfolio throughout the year and share that learning with the administration."
- ESA: Established an administrative role titled "Leader of Evidence-Based Learning" that is tasked to collect on data current learning practices and conduct analysis on the programs, structures, and processes that are designed to impact learning.
- CWB: Spent four weeks seeking and gathering examples of learning impacts. At the end of the time period they held "an 'evidence' day - [where they] submitted over 1000 pieces of evidence." At this point, supported by direct evidence of learning impacts, they felt "the jaron [of ACE] didn't pose a problem for everyone anymore."

These examples of creative methods to capture data align with Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder's (2008) call for an accountability system that moves beyond the "paper-and-pencil tests" (p. 6).

Although approximately 75% of statements provided in the learning principle reports aligned with the language of inputs and outputs rather than impacts on learning, a few examples of impact-aligned data collection and reporting methods can be found in Table 11.

6.7 Internal Analysis of Research Question Three: To what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?

Only 20% of statements in the learning principle reports aligned with the transformational language of impacts. That said, school administrators made numerous transformational-related comments during interviews. Statements related to the concept of transformation were found across all overarching categories of the interview data presented in Appendix H (Electing, Organizing, Examining, and After ACE), and three main focal areas emerged as administrators considered the process of transformation as catalyzed by ACE in their schools:

- Need to define or align on an understanding of transformational educational change,
- ACE protocol as a transformative process through organization and school examination, and
- Transformational accomplishments to date.

6.7.1 Need to define or align on an understanding of transformational educational change

Similar to what was stated earlier when considering the impact of learning practices, school administrators noted a need to define or align on a definition of transformation for their organizations. “We [CSB] had a lot of pre-work to ensure that we understood the language. It was different, it was important we had to be on the same page.” CWA’s administrator noted that “some people categorized the process as ambitious, pretentious” as they considered the language of transformation. CWB stated that “the ACE report, especially for a bilingual school, is a VERY dense document, very edu-jaron /edu-think. It took a number of meetings to try to figure out the words that didn’t make sense... It was dense, it was an American document.” That said, nearly all administrators indicated that their schools found some clarity on the terminology over time, most notably exemplified by CWB’s comment that at the end of the process “the jargon didn’t pose a problem for everyone anymore.” Definitions of transformation varied between schools and included statements such as “transformation is identity…. if it shakes up the image of the learner…” (ESA) and “transformation in the sense of understanding that the school is a learning community where each one of us is in a process of growth” (SSA).

6.7.2 ACE protocol as a transformative process

Numerous comments from school administrators regarding the transformative nature of ACE emerged when discussing both how schools organized their approach to the ACE procol as well as the reflections they conducted during and after the process. Administrators who had previously experienced NEASC/CIE’s 8th Edition accreditation protocol, such as CSB, drew comparisons that highlighted a transformational change in the conversations between adults within the community:

> “I think ACE allowed us to have conversations around teaching and learning that

> were different than if we were going through the 8th… Some of the work that we're doing is getting us to the place that other schools have been for a while. We could see this would be transformational for us. We're seeing a change in the way people are collaborating…"

By organizing a structure for collaborative conversations, CWA believed "the biggest benefit of the process was having whole school conversations about how we are approaching learning at different phases of our school. It was more about the discussion around learning, where we could take it to be more transformative." SSA identified that there was a transformation the understanding of accreditation resulting from ACE:

> "The new approach of ACE helped the board of directors to change the mindset of all the stakeholders in terms of accreditation. In general lines, accreditation can be easily related to stress, paperwork, and even sometimes a show. At SSA, with the new ACE framework, we wanted to do a self-reflection that helped us present where we are in the transformation journey. Therefore, the visit from the two representatives from NEASC/CIE was experienced as a friendly visit from peers who come to school to give us an external view on how we are on the process of achieving our school's vision. No more paperwork, no more large groups, no more stress. We just showed the reality and felt confident about it."

6.7.3 Transformational accomplishments to date

As noted above, multiple schools indicated that ACE drove a transformational change in the way their school approached adult collaboration via increased spaces for conversations about learning. At CSA this has resulted in structural changes that schools the administration felt necessary to drive transformation: "we've changed the teaching rubric - now about 90% focused on teaching and learning, not are you on time? Wearing the right clothes?". CWB noted a direct connection between observable data gathered by the NEASC/CIE visitors and the collaborative conversations driven by the ACE protocol:

> "We heard from the preliminary visit… when they came [we] had 25-30% of our classrooms actively engaged. When the ERV left, they reported approximately 60% of classrooms engaged. This was huge for 18 months! To hear words like 'risk takers' in describing teaching and learning - for example, teachers saying 'we're not really teaching inquiry, are we?' and wanting to know what to do differently is HUGE. This has driven conversations on how they can build risk into their classroom. That then leads to conversations about how well do you know your students? How can you encourage risk? So from my perspective

> we've grown a lot and this ACE, much more than the CIS model would have promoted."

SSA made similar connections resulting from the organization of collaborative professional spaces for teachers:

> "In places we are living it. For example, the teacher learning community (TLC) - each is assigned in a group on a topic they want to research. They meet regularly, research, put into place in the classroom, reflect on the outcome - they construct a portfolio throughout the year and share that with the learning administration - so that it is the only area that we feel we are living it rather than working on it."

More direct and targeted examples of transformational change amongst faculty and staff were highlighted by CSB's administrator who noted that he thought "ACE allowed us to have conversations around teaching and learning that were different than if we were going through the 8th Edition." He continued to describe how the community identified the need for better coaching practices to improve math instruction. Even if resource allocation might be considered to be input-orientated in the framework provided by Curtis, CSB's administrator found the work to be transformative insofar as "some of the work that we're doing is getting us to the place that other schools have been for a while. We could see this would be transformational for us. We're seeing a change in the way people are collaborating - they are not scared of math…"

It is noteworthy that the NEASC/CIE website specifically states that "impact does not mistake teacher 'behaviors' for evidence of impact on the learner" (2018), yet most comments regarding transformation across all schools cited transformational shifts in the adult community or structures to promote conversations or changes in learning. This may result from a lack of data to measure transformational change directly within learners, an issue that the administrator at SSA explained grappling with: "I would define us as 'working on it'. We are a learning community in a constant process of growth. We have some things in place with data, some with no data. We have things that we're thinking about, but we're trying to figure out how to get the data." At CSC the "data on the impact of learning for students is not yet available. We haven't executed on these items yet."

6.8 External Analysis of Research Question Three

Despite a lack of data on the transformational nature of ACE as directly related to students, the role of the ACE protocol as a catalyst for school change is noteworthy and aligns with other

accreditation research. In a study examining the characteristics of Maine's 'More Efficient' and 'Improving' schools, Stump and colleagues (2013) identify "three interconnected components that distinguished the journey of Maine's improving schools: catalyst for change, transformational leadership and academic focus" (p. 2). In elaborating on the first component, Stump writes:

> "Before there is significant and sustained reform that is evident within the school, there must be a defining factor—a catalyst— that forces a school community to pause, reflect and, ultimately, act. In this study, we define catalyst as the information provided to a school through a process of self-assessment or external evaluation. At minimum, the catalyst exposes what needs to be addressed, and, at best, it is perceived as an opportunity for systemic change" (p. 15).

It is important to note that most of the 121 public schools identified as improving would have been accredited by NEASC through the Commission on Public Schools. Stump goes on to note that:

> "For many schools, the external evaluations embedded within NCLB [No Child Left Behind] or NEASC necessitated school wide self-assessment of practices and student achievement levels. In some cases, program funding was dependent upon specific changes within a school... Improving Schools capitalized on an opportunity for self-assessment that laid the foundation for improvement, while the typical schools either responded ineffectively or not at all to a catalyst for change" (p. 15-16).

The role of NEASC's self-study served as the catalyst to "jumpstart the process for self-reflection within a school, then leaders translate a readiness for change into a vision and plan for improvement. As staff implements effective practices that move the school toward an academic focus, leadership is constantly refining their methods to build a culture of sustained improvement" (p. 13). The experience of schools in Maine as well as those experiencing ACE is consistent with expectations for accreditation as written in the literature, particularly that "accreditation relies on the candor of institutions to assess themselves against a set of standards, viewed in the light of their mission, and identify their strengths and concerns, using the process itself for improvement" (Brittingham 2009. p.10). A similar catalyst may be found in the self-study aspects of the ACE protocol.

Even if the language of ACE directs schools to focus on the impact of education on learners, reports of transformation in the adult communities at the schools in this study are meaningful.

Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder (2008) specifically note that "accountability systems must have ways to assess whether teachers and other youth development professionals are engaged in practices that are likely to lead to adequate outcomes many years later" (p. 7).

6.9 Conclusions Regarding Research Question Three: Two conclusions are drawn from the internal and external analysis of the data regarding the degree to which school leadership perceives ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools.

6.9.1 Conclusion #6: Although limited school-based data regarding student transformation exists, the self-study aspects of the ACE protocol may catalyze whole-school change.
Conclusion #5 illustrated how evidence-rich datasets could help schools to understand the impact of learning practices on students, however, limited data were found in the learning principle reports or emerged from interviews with school administrators regarding the transformation of students resulting from ACE. As seen in Table 8, the majority of responses found in the learning principle reports to the prompt "Where do we want to be - what impacts, outputs and inputs will demonstrate that your learning community has advanced on the Continuum? What will you have in place" were output-focused, discussing programs or structures to be added or amended within the school. SSA was re-redirected by the ACE visiting team who shared feedback that they should not "write as 'the school has, but the learners are…' We needed to not talk about the programs that we have but rather what the learners are doing". ACE changed the accreditation mindset to talk about what the learners were doing. For ESA, those outputs were developed and implemented for the purposes of driving transformational learning in students, yet the school did not focus as closely on the data collection methods to evaluate transformational learning.

ESA was the only school that shared such a directive from the ACE visiting team to cease innovating and to focus on the collection and evaluation of data for existing programs. For other schools in this study, administrators shared that they also needed to develop systems for collecting data on the impact of learning practices. A specific example of this was found at CSA where the school formed a professional learning community group charged with the task of evaluating a recently implemented "Personal Learning Project." A multi-year approach was developed where in the first year the team would "evaluate present system and structures and make a proposal for improvement. Trial changes and evaluate outcomes by collecting appropriate data [and in the second year] embed the new model into the documentation, timetable, staffing, resourcing and event calendar for CSA." At the time of the study, the team was nearing completion of year one and exploring ways to showcase the data collected during the trial period.

Finally, it is important to note that many of the learning practices noted in the learning principle reports were currently defined as aspirational by school administrators and not implemented within their schools at the time of the interview, and as such, schools were not positioned to even begin data collection. That said, school administrators were universally positive when speaking about ACE as a catalyst for identifying practices that may ultimately drive transformational learning in students. “The process doesn’t ensure transformation,” noted the CWA administrator, “but it allows the provocation to have the conversation towards it”.

6.9.2 Conclusion #7: The ACE protocol has transformed the adult community.

School administrators generally defined their communities as “thinking about it” or “working on it” in terms of the curation of illustrative data regarding the transformative impact learning practices on students. That said, multiple schools were able to provide clear anecdotal evidence of the transformation of the adult community which administrators attributed directly to ACE. Increased collaboration, as noted in conclusion two, may be related to this in schools that had not previously established robust systems for community dialogue, particularly across school divisions. For example, at CWA the self-study was organized into K-12 teams that conducted learning walks based on an assigned learning principle. “We heard more often than not from secondary [teachers] how amazed they were at the student centered learning in elementary. This helped to open up the secondary [school] to think about how they could do things differently… so that is transformative to some degree.” A similar sentiment echoed in a comment from CSC that the process “brought together different people to look at how we are going to change our practices. For the people who have joined these teams, who’ve never done this before, [the process is] probably already having an impact.”

Summary

Chapter six provided an analysis of and conclusions drawn from the data against the research questions this study. The paper will conclude in chapter seven with a consideration of the implications of the research and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter Seven: Significance, Implementations, and Contributions for Future Research

In 2016 the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on International Education unveiled the new accreditation protocol known as ACE, which openly proclaimed to promote the transformation of education within schools adopting the protocol. While a few studies regarding the experience and impact of NEASC accreditation on secondary schools are available in the literature, no known published studies have examined the experience of schools participating in the ACE protocol. As noted in chapter six, the main goal of the study was to determine the degree to which NEASC/CIE's ACE accreditation process affects NEASC/CIE member schools in the creation of transformative learning environments that address the needs of modern learners. By doing so, this study may also contribute to an evaluation of ACE's claim that accreditation can catalyze systemic educational change. Chapter six offered conclusions drawn from the data presented in chapter five. Chapter seven summarizes these conclusions in light of the wider considerations of and challenges for school accreditation as presented in the literature, followed by implementations and recommendations as applied to the findings of this study. The chapter will conclude with considerations for future research and final comments.

7.1 *Significance of the Study*

The literature reviewed in chapters one and two introduced and overviewed the purpose of school accreditation in an American context followed by arguments for and limitations of accreditation as promoting both school accountability and educational improvement. Major arguments for American school accreditation were that the process (1) helps to gauge the effectiveness by which a school is succeeding against its organizational mission and vision and (2) provides a public assurance of quality against a set of standards. The self-study serves as the primary vehicle by which a school can internally gauge the effectiveness of the organization against their published mission and vision as well as published accreditation standards. The self-study also provides space for the community to reflect upon and articulate goals for future growth. The data, analysis, and conclusions presented in chapters five and six of this study indicated that the ACE accreditation protocol drove collaborative conversations about the performance of the school against published accreditation standards, although data from some schools in the study (CWB, CSB) indicated that schools may, for various cultural and pragmatic reasons, question the efficacy of aligning to the "transformative" standards of ACE. There was strong alignment in the desire to maintain NEASC/ACE accreditation for public quality assurance reasons by nearly all schools within the study.

Chapters one and two also explored literature presenting major critiques of school accreditation that argued accreditation (1) was a process focused on obtaining the "minimum standards" for the purpose of accountability (Harvey & Newton, 2004), (2) was burdensome to schools (Kanter & Soo, 2013), (3) maintained an academic status quo, particularly in this era of testing accountability (McKenzie & Kress, 2015. Fertig 2015), and (4) protocols generated a problematic conflation of feedback for growth and measurement for accountability (Rothstein et al. 2008, Lauder et al. 2006). The data and conclusions presented in chapters five and six of this study indicated that all participating schools found the ACE accreditation protocol shifted the focus from compliance-based discussions and increased the examination of school policies, programs, etc., on the impact of learners. That said, many schools in this study indicated that the process was difficult to manage because of the density and complexity of language found in the ACE protocol as well as challenges with defining and measuring learning impacts. Should schools successfully identify ways to capture the data necessary to evaluate the impact of learning on learners, ACE could help to drive progress towards the changes in accreditation called for by Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder (2008) and Bae (2018) in a meaningful way.

This study provided an overview of the historical development of ACE, a description of and goals for this new accreditation protocol, and allowed ACE to be entered into the academic narrative. This study provided a background on why the protocol exists and what it intends to do. Although a small number of schools participated in this study, the data indicate that the *process* of completing ACE may be addressing what Rothstein et al. (2008) recommends for closing the "impact gap" (p. 155) by increasing the focusing on the experience and performance of students. That said, most of the schools participating in the study grappled with developing an understanding of the definition of learning impacts, as well as how to capture and codify educational impacts on learners. This is not surprising when considered through the lens of Rothstein et al. and may provide insight to his critique regarding the dual nature of accreditation (p. 30) as a structure to provide both feedback and growth, as well as externally legitimizing the school via the acquisition of the 'stamp of approval' by the accreditors. Given the importance of maintaining a positive accreditation status, this study questions whether it may be difficult or impossible to capture the subtle, less tangible nature of learner transformation when confronted with the issue of external legitimacy. As seen in Table 13, all schools participating in this study indicated that all school struggled to identify ways to define and display the impact of the educational program on their learners - a key requirement for ACE.

Despite their struggles, schools had to address the requirements of ACE. Through direct interviews with school administrators, this study contributes some early data on how schools measured and reported on the transformative accomplishments for learners. This early data may give insight into the ways that ACE schools respond to the calls by Rothstein et al. and Bae for accreditation teams to focus on student impacts in ways not seen in previous studies, such as those conducted by Flynn and Cushing. This could suggest that the ACE protocol may begin address the critique of accreditation provided by Rothstein et al., although further research is necessary. This may also suggest that if the ACE protocol focuses schools on the *collection* of impact-orientated data and schools develop robust methods to capture such data, perhaps a shift will occur, in time, to the ability for schools to describe the impact of their learning outcomes as related to the mission of their schools, which could be captured in an analysis of learning principle reports such as in Table 11.

The use of a "learning continuum" to gauge school performance against the learning principles may mitigate some of the tensions regarding feedback for growth versus accountability as there are no minimum thresholds that a school must reach against the learning principles to be awarded accreditation. That said, the evaluation of the foundation standards and the 4 Cs appear to serve in this capacity within the ACE protocol, although an exploration of these elements did not fall within the purview of this study.

7.2 *Implementations and contributions from this study*

Chapter one identified a number of stakeholders for whom this study might serve as beneficial. Two key stakeholders are NEASC/CIE and schools seeking to engage the ACE protocol. As a result of the findings of this study and the conclusions against the major research questions presented in chapter six, the following considerations are made to support both NEASC/CIE and schools engaging with ACE:

- Schools in this study appreciated the opportunity for increased conversations centered on learning principles and the impact that these principles have on students. That said, the language of ACE is very dense and difficult to unpack resulting in schools struggling to align their understanding of ACE terminology with what will be expected by ACE visitors. To increase the ability for schools to quickly engage in conversations, reflections and planning against the learning principles, greater clarification for key terminology should be provided by NEASC/CIE. Although this may include written definitions of terms, recognizing the linguistic challenges that may exist for individuals

and communities for whom English is not the first language, models and visual exemplars of complex, and frequently subjective, terms should be provided.

- Nearly all administrators interviewed for this study noted difficulty in documenting learning impacts. Only 20% of the comments written in the Learning Principle reports were identified as impact-oriented when answering the prompt, 'Where do we want to be? We will have in place…' This may result from a limited understanding of the term 'impact' or a limited ability to capture data that may look quite different from more traditional output-orientated data such as grades, school performance averages, etc. As such, it is recommended that NEASC/CIE not only provide examples to illustrate examples of learning impacts, but to also provide suggestions or resources for capturing this data. This may include facilitating opportunities showcase creative data capture methods. The administrator at CSB offered the following advice to future ACE schools: "before you get far into it, talk to other schools and create a complete plan, identify what is the end product to communicate what your learning is and if you really want to use as a transformational piece, how are you going to tie into the culture of forward thinking".

Although this study focused on accreditation through an American lens, accreditation is certainly not limited to American schools. Additionally, it can be assumed that most schools are genuinely concerned with providing students with transformative learning experiences, regardless of the system of oversight that is in place within their organization. To that end, this study may contribute to the work of other interested parties or organizations through publication in journals such as the Journal of Research in International Education and International Schools Journal.

7.3 *Contributions for future research*

At the time of this study the ACE protocol was truly in its infancy; countless opportunities for further study exist. This research might contribute to further studies in the following ways::

- ❏ Identifying Impacts on Learning: Data Collection

To build on Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder's call that accreditors should focus on the activities and experience of students (2008. p.155) and Bae's recommendation for the development of "data dashboards" (2018. p. 3) in order to understand student learning beyond standardized test scores, this study could contribute to further research focused on the data capture methods developed by ACE schools. Such research raises additional interesting questions such as whether or not it is possible to capture data on transformative learning for students, particularly over such a short period of time as an accreditation cycle, which is normally around eighteen months.

❏ Identifying Impacts on Learning: Longitudinal Study

Rothstein et al. note the difficulty of accreditation as a tool for viewing the impact on learning based on the inputs and outputs provided by schools. During a team visit, accreditation teams have to "assess whether teachers and other youth development professionals are engaged in practices that are likely to lead to adequate outcomes many years later" (2008. p. 7). The research presented in this study could contribute to future longitudinal studies on the impact of learning, in ways that help to move beyond data provided as a singular snapshot in time. As schools who engage in the ACE process develop structures for collecting impact data connected to specific inputs and outputs, opportunities to follow student learning and growth over many years may become available to researchers.

❏ Research on the continued development of ACE for use by NEASC

This case study may contribute to a number of future studies that may be beneficial directly to NEASC/CIE or the larger NEASC organization, including, but not limited to:

- The evolution of the inputs:outputs:impacts language between the Learning Principle and External Review reports.
- Analysis of Learning Principle Visitor reports as a tool for participating schools.
- Comparative experience of NEASC/CIE visitors between 8th Edition and ACE visits and/or comparisons of experiences between the various ACE visits (Foundation, Learning Principles and External Review Team).
- Perceptions of differing stakeholders regarding ACE, particularly board members, senior leadership, teachers, students, and families.
- Case studies/analysis of factors leading schools historically accredited by NEASC/CIE to reject the ACE protocol and/or transition to new accreditation agencies.
- Exploration of the impact of the ACE protocol on the development of accreditation protocols within the other NEASC commissions.

Of course, the claims of ACE as a "transformative" accreditation experience create space for interesting, more theoretical studies as well such as:

❏ Multiple administrators, particularly at CWB and CSB, raised questions regarding the tensions that arose around "transforming" the learning community which could open the door for explorations into the capacity and efficacy of organizations to absorb

transformational change.

- ❏ At the time of this study, the majority of schools adopting the ACE protocol were located outside of the United States and the populations of these communities are often highly international, or in some cases, the majority of teachers and learners may come from the local area. As Barbara Brittingham (2009) notes, "accreditation reflects American cultural values" (p. 11). While former accreditation models such as the 8th Edition evaluated a learning community against the mission and values of the school, ACE claims that it is not agnostic, instead putting forward a particular view on how education should be and requires schools to undergo the necessary transformation to achieve these goals. As such, questions arise regarding the degree to which ACE promotes an elitist, western/American, perspective? To what degree is the application of a particular educational philosophy ethical for an organization accrediting culturally diverse organizations? Does this protocol promote a new form of educational neocolonialism? Alternatively, are such goals for education universal, yet universally stymied by traditional accreditation, authorization or inspection models?

7.4 *In Conclusion*

In 2016 the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on International Education launched the new ACE protocol for school accreditation. The NEASC/CIE website (2018) claimed this protocol "presents a fundamentally different approach to accreditation" that "aims to transform rather than 'improve' schools and reshapes accreditation into an instrument to enable systemic change". This study investigated this claim through an examination of schools directly engaged in the ACE protocol, driven by three significant research questions:

1. What is the experience of NEASC/CIE member schools who have undertaken ACE accreditation protocol?
2. How has the ACE protocol impacted learning practices within participating schools?
3. To what degree does school leadership perceive ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change within their schools?

This study concluded that participant schools generally found the ACE accreditation protocol positively aligns with and promotes goals for learning in meaningful ways within their respective communities. Administrators interviewed for this study noted a variety of ways that the school community was impacted by participation in this protocol. Multiple schools perceived ACE as catalyzing transformational educational change, although perceptions of transformation varied

between schools. That said, the conclusions of this study rest upon the experience of a small population of "first-generation" ACE adopters. It is hoped that this study will encourage future research not only to better understand the ACE protocol, but also to contribute to the ongoing academic discourse surrounding educational accountability, accreditation, and ultimately, ways to best meet the current and future needs of learners.

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Appendix A

Summary of the NEASC/CIE accreditation protocol as presented in the *Main Guide to School Evaluation & Accreditation: CIS-NEASC 8th Edition* (Gallo & Woodward 2014. p. 8-10)

"The accreditation process involves five stages including:

(i). The Preliminary/Preparatory Visit
A two to three days visit to where NEASC/CIE members visit the school, clarify the various aspects in the accreditation process, and to ascertain the school's readiness to undertake the self-study.

(ii). The Self-Study
The self-study, lasting one to two years, that begins in Part One with a collection and analysis of data, including outcomes from opinion surveys applied to all constituent groups in the school community. In Part Two, members of the school community rate themselves against the Standards for Accreditation against the following areas:

A. School Guiding Statements
B. Teaching & Learning (reporting against both horizontal and vertical teaching learning perspectives across grade levels and with subject area or disciplinary groups)
C. Governance & Leadership
D. Faculty & Support Staff
E. Access to Teaching & Learning
F. School Culture & Partnerships for Learning
G. Operational Systems

Every staff member should participate in the self-study process and schools are encouraged to take action, or at minimum to create realistic plans, to address any areas found to be in less than satisfactory alignment with the School Guiding Statements or the Accreditation Standards & Indicators during the initial stages of the self-study.

(iii). The Team Visit
Following completion of the self-study, the school is visited by a team of peers from other NEASC/CIE accredited schools. The primary function of the Visiting Team is to assist the school by providing an objective assessment of the conclusions of the self-study. The Team visits the school for approximately one week to see it in action. Team members visit classrooms and other workplaces, and they talk with students, parents, members of the staff and Governing Body. They examine all aspects of the school in the light of the self-study, the school's own Guiding Statements, and the Accreditation Standards and Indicators. The job of the Team is to review the quality of the educational experiences offered at the school – with an emphasis on Student Learning and Well Being - not to assess the qualities of individual teachers.

The Team will write its report as a response to every part of the self-study, and will include its Significant Commendations, Significant Recommendations and Additional

Appendix A (cont.)

Advice, and make an overall recommendation with regard to possible accreditation of the school directly to CIS and NEASC.

(iv). Decision on Accreditation
Respective structures within CIS and NEASC - including the Commission on International Education (CIE) - are used to carefully review the Visiting Team Report and consider the recommendations of the Visiting Team relative to possible accreditation of the school within this range of possibilities:
a. Award Accreditation or Re-accreditation.
b. Award Accreditation or Reaccreditation with specific qualifications.
c. Postpone Accreditation or Reaccreditation for some specified reason(s).
d. Not award Accreditation or Re-accreditation.

(v). Subsequent Procedures
A number of follow-up procedures have been established, including:
a. The routine Two Year Report on Progress and Planning from the school.
b. The routine Five Year Report on Progress and Planning from the school.
c. Special Reports and/or Special Visits at any stage of the accreditation cycle if considered necessary.

Appendix B

Introductory Email Request to Participate in Research Study

Dear,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Kim Raccio and I am reaching out to today to connect with you or a member of your administration regarding your participation in the ACE accreditation process with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Council on International Education (NEASC/CIE). Specifically, I am seeking schools such as yours as potential collaborators in a research project regarding international accreditation currently being conducted by the University of Bath (UK).

Specific details of my study can be found on the attached consent form. In summary, my research involves an analysis of reports produced by schools as part of the new ACE protocol. To that end, I am seeking international schools who are currently involved in the ACE protocol to share with me a copy of their Learning Principles report which they have already submitted to NEASC. As per the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and the University of Bath Department of Education, all information shared with me will be handled confidentially and ethically. This doctoral research is solely as part of my Ed.D and the University of Bath. No information will be shared with NEASC at any time.

I do hope that your school will consider participating in, what I believe, will be a valuable piece of research that holds the potential to support the wider international school community.

Next Steps for Participation: Should your school be interested in participating in this study, there are a few options:

1. You can reply to this email in the affirmative and please include a signed copy of the attached consent form (electronic signature is sufficient).

OR

2. You can forward me the contact details of a person involved in the accreditation process and I will follow up with specific next steps with that individual.

3. You or a member of your team may send a copy of your learning principles report at this time or at a future date.

Of course, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions. I can be reached via email at K.M.Raccio@bath.ac.uk or k[redacted], by phone [redacted], or skype at [redacted]

About the researcher: I am currently a doctoral student at the University of Bath completing my Ed.D in International Education. Professionally, I am the founding principal of Brooklyn Prospect Charter High School, an IB High School within a small diverse, charter network in New York City. I spent many years as an Assistant Head of School in the UK and as a consultant supporting international programs for American students abroad. I participated in numerous visiting teams with NEASC over the past decade and chaired this process within my own school. To that end, I recognize the importance accreditation holds for schools globally and am excited to be conducting research with the University of Bath on the new ACE protocol recently launched by NEASC/CIE.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I do hope to hear from you or a member of your team in due course.

Sincerely,

Kim Raccio

Appendix C

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study Form

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION
Doctoral Research

Researcher's Name: Kim Raccio
Doctoral Candidate
University of Bath

INTRODUCTION
Your organization is being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted by myself, Kim Raccio, a doctoral student at the University of Bath. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. Details regarding this study are included in this letter.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time.

This is a non-funded research project conducted as a partial requirement for the fulfillment of of the Doctor of Education program at the University of Bath.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this research is to explore the the new ACE accreditation protocol recently launched by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on International Education (NEASC/CIE). Please note, this research is solely for the University of Bath and is not in any way affiliated with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

HOW MANY PARTICIPANTS WILL BE IN THE STUDY?
Approximately 30-40 schools will be approached to take part in this study internationally.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?
As a participating school, you are being requested to share a copy of the Learning Principles report that you have completed and submitted to NEASC with the researcher, Kim Raccio. A member of your administration, or someone who was overseeing/familiar with the production of your Learning Principles report will also be requested to participate in an interview with Kim allowing the researcher to better understand the process that your school engaged in in the preparation this paper. The interview will be conducted via phone/skype and will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?
Your participation will be limited to the sharing of the Learning Principles report and a 30-45 minute interview. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?
While there are limited benefits for your school directly, this study has the potential to generate data that may help inform the accreditation process and provide beneficial outcomes for schools internationally who are accredited by NEASC.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?
There is no cost to you nor will there be any costs to schools participating in this study.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?
You also have the option of not participating in this study, and will not be penalized for your decision.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Data provided by your school in the form of the Learning Principles report, or interviews with staff from schools be anonymized. No identifying features (names, unique titles, etc) will be appear within the final research report submitted to the University of Bath. As this research is being conducted solely for the University of Bath, no data of any kind will be provided to NEASC. Copies of the Learning Principles report and transcripts of interviews conducted with schools will reside in a dedicated cloud-based account maintained by only the researcher. Access to the final research report as submitted to the University of Bath by Kim Raccio will remain limited to university faculty relevant to the review of this study for the purposes of the doctoral program until all schools participating in the study have completed their current accreditation cycles with NEASC.

Any data provided to the researcher will be used solely for the purpose of this study.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?
Your school will receive no payment for participation in this study.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?
Please contact Michael Fertig, Director of Studies (M.Fertig@bath.ac.uk) at the University of Bath if you have questions about the research. Additionally, you may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the research team.

SIGNATURES
I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

_____
Signature

_____
Title

_____
Date

Appendix D

Permission for Name Attribution in Thesis

Bradley, Jeff <jbradley@neasc.org> Wed, Feb 20, 5:26 PM
to me

Hi Kim,

Congrats on getting so far along. I look forward to reading it when it's ready.
Thanks for asking. I spoke with you in my capacity as Director NEASC/CIE and have no problem being mentioned by name and title in that context within your dissertation.
Good luck in Kuwait. You'll be working alongside a pro!

Jeff

Name attribution in Thesis Inbox ×

Kim Raccio Feb 21, 2019, 10:33 AM
Hi Greg, Happy New Year to you! I hope this email finds you well! I am in the final stages of writing my dissertation (hard …

Greg Curtis <greg@gregcurtis-consulting.ca> Feb 21, 2019, 10:38 AM
to me

Hi Kim,
All is well and Happy New Year to you as well. We just finished Chinese Lunar New Year here in Beijing, so it's still fresh.

Whatever works and is best for you is fine. It sounds like it would save you some editing time to simply name me and use the bio (if it's helpful . . . not a big deal to me if you want to leave it out . . . not sure if you need to authenticate me as a source.

So, yes, I answer in the affirmative.

Best of luck and congratulations on getting so close to the finish line!

Best,
Greg

Name usage in EdD thesis Inbox ×

Kim Raccio Wed, Feb 20, 8:56 AM
Hi Peter, I hope this email finds you well! I am getting excited for our upcoming visit to Kuwait! I am in the final stages of …

Mott, Peter <pmott@neasc.org> Wed, Feb 20, 9:30 AM
to me

Hi Kim,

I am perfectly ok with you using my name in your dissertation....!

Cheers and see you soon!

Peter

Sent from my iPad

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for School Administrators

General School Information (closed questions):

- ❏ What is your current role in your school?
- ❏ How long has your school been in existence?
- ❏ General student/faculty demographic?
- ❏ General percentage of US citizens (students, faculty if applicable)?
- ❏ Have you been accredited previously with NEASC?
- ❏ If yes, how long, under what editions?
- ❏ Is your school accredited or authorized by other organizations? If yes, which?

ACE-Specific Questions (open prompts):

- ❏ Why as an organization have you elected to maintain US accreditation with NEASC/CIE? Why ACE now?
- ❏ Where are you currently at in the accreditation process?
- ❏ Can you describe your experience with the ACE accreditation protocol? How did your school tackle this protocol?
- ❏ For previously accredited schools: What similarities or differences have you experienced in your preparation for accreditation under the ACE protocol?
- ❏ Every learning principle asked you to describe the "Desired Impacts" - how did you or your team define what an "Impact" is? Can you provide some examples that you have mentioned in your Learning Principle (LP) or External Review Visit (ERV)?
- ❏ If a LP visit has occurred, what feedback did you receive on the paper/visit? To what degree, if any, have your action plans and work during the period of the self study been modified from the time of the LPR to ERV?
- ❏ Has the ACE protocol impacted or altered learning practices within your school? If yes, What examples can you provide? If no, why not? Are these practices (A) generally something you currently have in place and have data to explain, (B) you hope to have in place, or (C) you have in place but have no data yet.
- ❏ NEASC/CIE aims for ACE to yield 'transformational' educational change within schools. What would transformative educational change look like to you? To what degree did you perceive ACE as transformative for your school? Please provide evidence/examples of why this was/was not transformational.
- ❏ What else can you share with me about your experience with ACE? Are there questions were expecting to be asked but were not?

Appendix F

NEASC/CIE Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study Form from Director Jeffrey Bradley

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION
Doctoral Research

Researcher's Name: Kim Raccio
Doctoral Candidate
University of Bath

INTRODUCTION
Your organization is being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted by myself, Kim Raccio, a doctoral student at the University of Bath. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. Details regarding this study are included in this letter.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time.

This is a non-funded research project conducted as a partial requirement for the fulfillment of of the Doctor of Education program at the University of Bath.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this research is to explore the the new ACE accreditation protocol recently launched by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on International Education.

HOW MANY PARTICIPANTS WILL BE IN THE STUDY?
Approximately 30-40 schools will be approached to take part in this study internationally.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?
The NEASC/CIE is being asked to share information regarding the names of schools that are have recently completed or are currently involved in accreditation via the ACE Protocol. You will also be requested to participate in an interview allowing the researcher to better understand the ACE process.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?
This study will take 18 months to complete, however your participation will be limited to the initial conversation regarding schools participating in ACE. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?
This study has the potential to generate data that may benefit NEASC/CIE in multiple ways, including helping to drive future revisions of the ACE protocol for CIE as well as support the other NEASC commissions as they commence their own review of accreditation policies and practices.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?
There is no cost to you nor will there be any costs to schools participating in this study.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?
You also have the option of not participating in this study, and will not be penalized for your decision.

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

CONFIDENTIALITY
Data from additional surveys or interviews will schools be anonymized. No data containing any identifying features (names, unique titles, etc) will be provided to NEASC, to school administrators or appear within the final research report. Transcripts of interviews conducted with schools will reside in a dedicated cloud-based account maintained by only the researcher.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?
NEASC will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?
Please contact Michael Fertig, Director of Studies (M.Fertig@bath.ac.uk) at the University of Bath if you have questions about the research. Additionally, you may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the research team.

SIGNATURES
I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

[redacted]

Signature
Director, NEASC Commission on International Education

Title
April 8, 2018

Date

Appendix G

Averages of Input:Output:Impact Results from Learning Principle Reports for Participating Schools Against Ten Learning Principles

Phase		Inputs						Outputs						Impacts					
		The actions, processes and resources needed to achieve desired outputs. Examples can include, but are not limited to funding streams, professional development opportunities, staff time allocation, etc.						*The programs and structures needed to achieve desired inputs. Examples can include, but is not limited to curriculum maps, student programs, courses of study, etc.*						*The desired observable and measurable disciplinary or trans-disciplinary student learning outcomes as related to the mission. Examples can include, but are not limited to student, teacher and community statements about learning, metacognitive opportunities (self reflection, peer review), etc.*					
	Definition (McTighe & Curtis 2016)																		
	Schools	SSA	ESA	CSA	CWA	CSB	CSC	CWB	SSA	ESA	CSA	CWA	CSB	CSC	CWB	SSA	ESA	CSA	CWA	CSB	CSC	CWB
Learning Architecture (A)	Learning Principle (LP) 1: Learning Goals. *"Learners demonstrate understandings, competencies, knowledge, dispositions and values that will allow thme to become responsible and successful citizens."*		0%	33%	37%	0%	40%	33%		40%	50%	26%	86%	60%	33%		60%	17%	37%	14%	0%	33%
	LP2: Dimensions of Learning. *"Learning encompasses creative, moral, social and entrepreneurial dimensions"*		0%	30%	46%	0%	50%	40%		80%	60%	36%	50%	50%	40%		20%	10%	18%	50%	0%	20%
	LP3: Assessment for, of, and as Learning. *"Assessment measures the effect of learning on the learner. Assessent, for, of, and as learning includes qualitative as well as quantative criteria."*		0%	0%	75%	0%	25%	20%		0%	0%	25%	100%	50%	80%		100%	100%	0%	0%	25%	0%
	LP4: Learning Perspectives. *"Meaningful learning is extended when learners explore the unfamiliar, consider a range of perspectives, and take informed risks. Mistakes are seens as spportunities for learning."*	7%	0%	0%	40%	33%	12.50%	0%	57%	100%	100%	40%	33%	75%	100%	36%	0%	0%	20%	33%	12.50%	0%
Learning Culture (C)	LP5: Learner Engagement and Autonomy. *"Learners are engaged with and inspired by their learning. They have autonomy over their learning and make incofmed choices, supported by teachers acting as coaches and mentors."*		0%	0%	27%	0%	83%	0%		67%	40%	55%	86%	17%	66%		33%	60%	18%	14%	0%	33%
	LP6: Research and Reflection on Learning. *"Research, reflection and future design-oriented thinking are valued and acted upon by the community of learners."*		0%	40%	0%	25%	40%	0%		100%	60%	100%	50%	40%	50%		0%	0%	0%	25%	20%	50%
	LP7: Inclusiveness of Learning. *"The learning community embraces as culture of inclusiveness."*		25%	0%	0%	14%	78%	0%		75%	100%	100%	57%	22%	75%		0%	0%	0%	29%	0%	25%
	LP8: Governance and Leadership for Learning. *"Governance, leadership, and management support, embody, and promote the organization's intended learning impacts, norms and values."*	40%	29%	0%	25%	50%	88%	0%	50%	71%	33%	75%	50%	12%	100%	10%	0%	66%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Learning Ecology (E)	LP9: Learning Place & Time. *"The design of learning spaces and the structuring of learning time are driven and shaped by the learning community's intended learning impacts."*		0%	25%	17%	33%	100%	12%		100%	25%	50%	67%	0%	63%		0%	50%	33%	0%	0%	25%
	LP10: Learning Community. *"Respectful, healthy, ethical relationships and interactions create a true sense of community. Communication is honest and transparent. Community values are clearly stated, actively lived and define a distinct, sustained identity."*	0%	0%	18%	0%	0%	75%	0%	85%	50%	55%	83%	60%	25%	100%	14%	50%	27%	17%	40%	0%	0%
	Individual School I:O:I Averages	16%	5%	15%	27%	16%	59%	11%	64%	68%	52%	59%	64%	35%	71%	20%	26%	33%	14%	21%	6%	19%
	I:O:I Catagory Average				21%							59%							20%			

Appendix H

Emerging Themes from School Leadership Interviews

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic examples
Electing ACE Factors driving the school's to engage in the new ACE protocol.	*Reputation*	*For University Placement* ● 80% of students were selecting UK and US colleges for post secondary. (CWB) ● We have a lot that apply to US colleges. You could argue that this makes it easier for applications. Because it's CIE that make it easier for international students.(CSB) ● Parents look for it, especially if parents are looking for American colleges. (CSC)
		As an American educational entity/public perception ● Because of the American community, We serve the american consulate. (CSB) ● Being an American curriculum school, we need an accrediting body that will provide an american diploma. (CWA) ● The school was in a rocky position in its first few years for funding, there was a pull to have accreditation from a reputable organization. (ESA) ● We feel that having accreditation is helpful - [that is the] perception… not sure if that has been proven with data. (CWB) ● The founder of the school had researched qualification programs, picked NEASC. It was a sign of excellence. (SSA)
		For recruitment ● We are the only trust-based non-profit, it's the school of choice for consulate employees, we want to make sure that this portion of our demographics needs meets. (CSB) ● Also, gives credit to teachers we are trying to recruit from the US. (CSC)
	Personal Connection	● Senior Leadership Team leaders wanted to keep with NEASC because they're a body we're familiar with (CSC) ● We have a close relationship with NEASC. The head of school is on the board (CSB) ● Peter Mott has a number of connections [to education in this region], particularly with the ministry of education - having these connections is helpful - rather than WASC Middle States, etc…(CWA)
	Programmatic Alignment	*With the Mission and Vision* ● Now it's really about ACE, we feel they are very aligned with our framing of education; The ACE framework helped us to actualize what living our vision is. (ESA) ● Had early new documents and drafts of ACE but it is in our mission to innovative so went for it. (CSA)
		With other organizations ● We also had other accreditations happening with the joint visit. On other accreditations, ex. IB, we tried to think about how these aligned through the ACE lens… at first that was hard. (CSC) ● We merged CIS/IB/ACE...and ran a joint CIS/ACE/IB wasn't super collaborative (CWB) ● Members of the self study team led a big idea in the reports (IB/ACE/CIS) - ex Space and Resources. We identified "big buckets" any of the standards that fell under that bucket, I led the inquiry. Another one was well being and welfare. We would drive ourselves crazy if we were looking for those standards three or four times over for all the different reports. Then the community could choose three things and were assigned to a larger bucket. (ESA)

		With the school strategic plan ● They analyzed the ACE framework, it was very positive to see the high level alignment between [the strategic plan] and ACE. So it wasn't a huge problem in terms of alignment. As a follow up, we're taking the structure of ACE and using that for our strategic planning (SSA) ● There was more of a conversation to determine how accreditation means something to us, how it aligns with our strategic planning process.(CSB) ● The whole network had a desire to stay in NEASC. It seemed if we were going it would make sense to do it all together (CSC) ● We have a strategic plan, and it needed to be focused on learning. Because the conversation in ACE is related to learning, it was helpful to us to be useful for the strategic planning. (CSB) ● ACE was central to our strategic learning plan (ex. Learning principle five). It leaked into everything that we did. All of our design thinking time has been used to think about how we can have greater autonomy in learning opportunities (ex. Going all over the world for 6th months); free time in the days; etc. There is nothing that we are doing this year that is not related to our learning plans that came out of ACE. We will go back to the board to discuss the foundational standards, connect to the learning plans, get feedback from parents/students/etc. And this will form the bedrock of the strategic plan moving forward. Ex. possibly opening a primary school - but need to think about how the learning plans would look in that space. (CSA)
Organizing ACE Process of and logistics for completing the learning principles element of the candidacy phase of ACE.	*Collaboration*	● This time felt a lot more inclusive of the whole school (I have only had one previous accreditation w/NEASC). Under 8th, our lower school head pulled the whole paper together. (CSC) ● Made 10 teams - that was very helpful for us - we were able to wrap our minds around the big idea. Before the teams had been small, mostly administration, heads of departments, and this time everyone had a chance to participate. (CWB) ● The largest voice from teachers - they felt they had input in the process but it wasn't overwhelming and didn't take away their work from teaching and learning. Some people volunteered to be involved more. We worked with parents on strategic planning day. (have this every year, this was focused on ACE this year). About 10 students were also involved (CSB) ● For the self study - we identified a captain for each learning principle (mostly leaders). Each LP had ~15 K-12 teachers on each LP. Had ~seven hour long sessions for each team. St. We used the guiding questions that NEASC sent as provocations to start or end each session.(CWA) ● We had a very distributed process (~33 staff, some part time). We were able to take every learning principle and assign to three staff. Initial meeting for the ACE. The whole school wrote the report. It was really easy to get everyone involved. Even as a leadership team we reviewed the learning plan, edited a bit, but there was nothing wildly crazy and out of line. (CSA) ● All leadership was a mentor for each self-study committee, it was not led by leadership; Under the 8th - I was looking at one standard. It wasn't as much of a community investment. (ESA)
	Clarification of ACE Terminology	● Had a lot of pre-work to ensure that we understood the language. It was different, it was important we had to be on the same page. It was good that the full CSC network was all using the same language, that helped. (CSC) ● Started looking at the documentation - what is ACE…. it took a while. At first read, it was nothing like anything that we've read before…. We had to do a few readings, and it started to become a bit more clear… what was the difference between working on it, living it, etc. (CWA) ● It took some time to figure out the language of ACE (ex. Learner, Self directed learning definitions, etc…) at first we needed to understand the framework, we unpacked that. (SSA)

		• When we got the framework we were like "whoa, what's this?" - we liked the questions, it's all about the right things, but the language is very subjective. Ex. working on it, etc., we were kind of stabbing in the dark… we had no mentor, there was no template, so we stabbing into the dark. (ESA) • The ACE report, especially for a bilingual school is a VERY dense document. Very edu-jaron /edu-think. Took a number of meetings to try to figure out the words that didn't make sense in the learning principles (had 29 words). It was dense, it was an american document. [At the end], the jaron didn't pose a problem for everyone anymore. It was a greater PD tool for the school than the 8th edition. The 8th felt like another version of CIS.(CWB) • Multiple things impacted our development from the LP. The visitors on the LP visit give a four hour workshop that really helped to learn more about impacts vs. outputs. vs. inputs. This helped them [SLT] to mature more in thinking. The weekend before the visit, hosted at visitors training, helped to develop an internal understanding amongst staff.(CSB)
	NEASC/CIE Support	• Strategic retreat meetings - the chairs discussed the terminology, our current understanding and also what we think NEASC means, Jeff Bradley came to run a workshop right at the beginning to secure the understanding.[Another leader] ran a full-school meeting/workshop to discuss Input/output/impact terms, then we started the break down into the teams.(CSC) • When I went to the training in London, I was told there was going to be a bank of exemplars… but I didn't see that. I think this would be VERY helpful for particularly bilingual schools. They do a good job of laying out thinking about it, working on it, living it… to see what different schools are doing at each of these stages…(CWB) • If NEASC wants to bring people along in this model there needs to be some coaching or mentoring, even if not via NEASC, but somehow connected with others. Because it is so drastically different, some coaching or mentoring around the key ideas would be helpful…Then people could really focus on the transformation piece and not struggle with 'What do we do with this', 'Do you think this means what I think this means'? It's fine to send the framework, but it needs some human connection. Jeff Bradley came and did the LP workshop AND we had the training to be visitors, so we were lucky. Then Darlene came - we had lots of support. (ESA) • Thinking of the framework as a teacher… if it was a new curriculum, you'd really need someone to explain this….someone to talk through this. If[we] struggled with this I can only imagine what other schools might struggle or be shocked with about the protocol... We struggled with this word [Impacts] a lot - had Darlene Fisher come and run a workshop on that. For the LP report we had a training with Jeff Bradley, and had Darlene Fisher [impacts] and Trillium Hillaband, so that I could reach out to her with questions.(ESA)
	Scheduling/ Tactical Approach	• We divided up the report into ten teams for the ten principles and had a chair for each LP, this wasn't very top down at all. Chairs were SL - we scheduled these meetings into the calendar so we were all learning about ACE together. We did this work prior to the NEASC LP visit. (CSC) • We built in ACE planning time into the PD calendar. (CSB) • Practically, I'm not as proud of the Learning Principle as the External Review report. The Learning Principle report was all over the map with style… we went back and reviewed, got better, but still lots of different voices, I went back and read through to have common style. For the ERV I hired a writer to help, gave bulleted ideas to the writer. She gave them the content for the teams to edit. (CSB) • We set aside whole professional learning days for this. Gear up the day before. Then spend 8 hours talking and focusing for the next 8 hours. Short but intensive bursts of energy. (CIS used to be dissipated and less

		effective) Really productive process that all bought into! (ESA) ● Involvement of other teachers happened after the LP visit. We had been inspected by the local governing agency in the first half of the year, so we didn't want to burn out the teachers. So mostly Senior Leadership Team at the Learning Principles [start]. (CWA)
Examining ACE The school's reflection on itself through the ACE framework.	*Discussions about Learning*	● We enjoyed the ACE protocol. It had so many opportunities to discuss learning.You get to spend your time talking about learning which is the whole goal" that shift in emphasis and approach and that makes it meaningful, I would do it again (CSA) ● The biggest benefit of the process was having whole school conversations about how we are approaching learning at different phases of our school; It was more about the discussion around learning, where we could take it to be more transformative. (CWA) ● This time there is a shift to "transformational learning", so we were able to approach the whole process with a degree of flexibility because it hadn't been done before. (CSC) ● Feedback [from NEASC] was "don't write as 'the school has, but the learners are…" we needed to not talk about the programs that we have but rather what the learners are doing. ACE changed the accreditation mindset to talk about what the learners were doing. (SSA)
	Evidence Based Approaches	● [We had] "Data in a day" to do observations of classes against learning principles; At the end, we had four weeks, we had an "evidence" day - they submitted over 1000 pieces of evidence. (CSB) ● We didn't want this process to be a checklist for compliance. We really wanted a reflection of what was currently happening in the school (SSA) ● The biggest struggle is the MEASURE on impact. It isn't something that is easily measured. (CWA) ● Collecting data on "impacts" - that was a questions we had before, during and after the visit. Best we could come up with was collecting anecdotal evidence. Surveys of the community. Conversations with teachers… finding from them what they think the impact on students will be. I don't know that we have a definite answer on that. (CWA)
	Accreditation Comparisons	● The other edition was a lot of standards and substandards, so that's I guess why CIS/and 8th could share reports. At the core, the values around the two are in place (child safety, rigor). (ESA) ● The old 8th was so bureaucratic; I never felt it drove school improvement, it was mutually beneficial, you get your badge and they get you through the process; Lots of disconnected committees in the large schools that I've worked with - quickly reverted to a box ticking exercise. "You're paying your dues, so you do this" (CSA) ● There were less checking boxes. For example - you're not talking about how quickly you could get out of the building in a fire drill (CWA). ● Previous accreditation models were much more about jumping through hoops. When I looked at the 8th, it was just about getting the paper done. The 8th didn't give us leverage to move forward on what we wanted to focus on.(CSB)
	Alignment with "Impacts"	● We defined it [impacts] as "Active outcomes", things we could physically see, things that were moving us in the direction we wanted to go. The process of moving from point A to B. (CSB) ● We landed on the idea that impact was change or gain in learning. For example in piloting and development of the MYP interdisciplinary project… impacted results in the personal project. Traceable to an action. (SSA) ● Previous versions of accreditation caused stress… teachers are not the main focus, it is on the students. The teachers knew that ACE was coming to look at what the students were doing. So this is how we started to think about impacts. (CSA) ● That is how we can define the impact, we can see this process occurring. (ESA)

	Defining Transformation	• Transformation is identity…. If it shakes up the image of the learner… changes our definition, or evolving/adapting the definition of that. (ESA) • Transformation in the sense of understanding that the school is a learning community where each one of us is in a process of growth (SSA) • It [ACE protocol] promotes transformative education… if you look at the continuum… it says: "what if"... it really makes you think about what if you tried something different. The process doesn't ensure transformation, but it allows the provocation to have the conversation towards it. It might depend on the school - it could be transformative for schools that are still sitting in rows. (CWA) • There are questions and pushback about whether or not we want to be as transformational as came out of the study. There has been lots of questions about our identity, what do we want to be. There are questions about whether or not we will do this process again. For me, transformational education starts with an individual teacher recognizing that something needs to be changed or morphed. It requires self reflection. I KNOW we've had more people looking at their own practice. (CWB) • I do think this process has the potential to help transform school… there are conversations about transforming, rather than continuous improvement… I don't know if it's semantics, but I think that continuous change is transformation, it's moving from one thing into another. (CSB)
After ACE Data that that was resulted from the conclusion of the process as well as questions that emerged for the school regarding next steps.	*Data & Measurement of Impacts*	• Data on impact of learning for students is not yet available. They haven't executed on these items yet. (CSC) • We have a high level of major learning plans...These will turn into proper management plans so that they can start action against, have accountability and how we will measure success and impact - but we're still continuing and developing that. It is hard to put measurement against impact, probably have to put more thought into it than an input or output. It is hard to explain to board re: financial/budget but we need to be able to show this so that you can show the value of this. (CSA) • 50% [of what we have in place] is beyond aspirational. We're making things, but we're not at the stage of collecting data yet. So 0% of "living it" (CWB) • Data against this is anecdotal at the moment (there is a process, it is qualitative. Getting feedback from teachers, videoing lessons and interviewing kids [with questions like] what are you learning? How does this connect to previous learning? The media team documenting events in 'brief cool ways". Helpful in painting a picture in what we were after. Not even 4 minutes long, but we have all these interviews. In conversations teachers are really appreciative.(CSB) • We ended up with 12 learning plans (strategic learning initiatives). Each of those is set up to collect data to ensure that we're moving in the direction we want to move. (CWA) • I would define us as "working on it". We are a learning community in a constant process of growth. We have some things in place with data…. some with no data. We have things that we're thinking about, but we're trying to figure out how to get the data. (SSA) • We have all these things that we are doing and that we want to get data about. We don't have evidence of impacts. [When we received the] report from NEASC, [feedback] was to stop trying new things and innovating new things but to rather get more data on the impacts. We thought that we were not doing enough and NEASC was like, "relax and evaluate what we were doing already". (ESA)
	Accomplish-ments to date	• We heard from the preliminary visit… when I came had 25-30% of our classrooms actively engaged. When the ERV left, they reported ~60% of classrooms engaged. This was huge for 18 months! To hear words like "risk takers" in describing teaching and learning (ex teachers saying "we're not really teaching inquiry, are we" and wanting to know what to do differently) is HUGE. This has driven conversations on how they can build risk into their classroom. That then leads to conversations about

		how well do you know your students? How can you encourage risk? So from my perspective we've grown a lot and this ACE, much more than the CIS model would have promoted. (CWB) ● We've changed the teaching rubric - now about 90% focused on teaching and learning, not 'are you on time?', 'wearing the right clothes?'....(CWB) ● CSB is now looking at how they are going to parley the structures they built into ALL forward planning and communicate to all. (CSB) ● In places we are living it. Ex. teacher learning community (TLC) - each is assigned in a group on a topic they want to research. They meet regularly, research, put into place in the classroom, reflect on the outcome - they construct a portfolio throughout the year and share that with the learning administration - so that it is the only area that we feel we are living it rather than working on it. (SSA)

Appendix I

Historical Overview of U.S. School Accountability Systems

Early U.S. Accountability Systems (Late 18th - Early 20th Century)

Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder (2008) provide a useful survey of the literature overviewing early U.S. accountability systems in their book, Grading Education: Getting Accountability Right. Summarizing 250 years of educational policy, they note that the early American founders of the 1700s, including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington, held strong opinions regarding what should be taught in schools in order to establish personal well-being and protect the fledgling democracy. Although specific methods of government oversight into educational programs were not prevalent in this era, a requirement to establish public educational systems was embedded in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 (p. 16), and subsequently connected the release of federal funds to state-delivered educational services for all newly established states.

Although elementary and secondary public schools were proliferating across colonial urban centers, these public schools tended to serve the poor Americans, while wealthier families enrolled their students in private academies or boarding schools. The quality of education in public versus private institutions varied significantly and elementary and secondary private schools quickly established themselves as feeder organizations for elite universities such as Harvard and Yale. Data from 1802-1820 indicated that 85% of students accepted to Harvard University hailed from private schools, while the remaining 15% had attended Boston Latin School, a public school (Story 1975). Interested in learning more about what transpired within both the public and private schools of their region, a Pennsylvania workingmen's committee visited various schools in 1830 and "denounced urban public schools that serve mostly the poor and stressed basic skills while children of the rich attended private schools with broader ambitions" (Rothstein et al. 2008, p. 17).

Recognizing the need for a free, basic education for all children as fundamental to the maintenance of a democratic republic, Horace Mann responded to the concerns of this bifurcated educational system by championing the Common School Movement in the United States in 1837. Mann's philosophical approach towards public education contained five fundamental tenets, including that common schools:

- "must be paid for, controlled, and sustained by an interested public;

- is best provided in schools embracing children of all religious, social, and ethnic backgrounds;
- must be free of sectarian religious influence;
- must be permeated throughout by the spirit, methods, and discipline of a free society, which preclude harsh pedagogy in the classroom;
- can be provided only by well-trained, professional teachers" (Cremin, 2006, p. 1).

As common schools took root across the U.S., accountability measures were enacted to ensure that the enrolled students were in fact afforded access to the educational services these schools intended to provide. Massachusetts executed the first compulsory education legislation in 1852 whereby families could be fined if school committees uncovered that children were not being educated until the age of fourteen (Hardenbergh 2003; FindLaw 2018). During this time, Mann continued to promote the necessity of education to maintain the existence of a democratic republic, work that was later supported by other educational scholars such as John Dewey (1914).

As noted by Rothstein et al. (2008), schools continued to proliferate across America at the turn of the 20th century, supporting the educational needs for both primary and secondary students. To support these schools, the National Education Association (NEA) was established and organized various commissions - specifically the "Committee of Ten" focusing on secondary schools, and the "Committee of Fifteen" focusing on primary schools - that published reports intending to guide the development the academic offerings to students in pursuit of university education. As demographics changed and secondary schools enrolled ever increasing percentages of working-class children not intending to obtain higher academic pursuits, the NEA offered additional guidance on the content of academic programs. Various NEA initiatives, including the Cardinal Principles in 1918, the Kelly Committee in 1930 and the Educational Policies Commission report in 1938 all echoed in various forms the importance of embedding specific academic content into the overall school curriculum in order to ensure a democratic and free America. Concurrently, to ensure that such content was being delivered to students, these commissions and reports increasingly called for tests and other evaluations to measure the performance of schools against these ideals.

Conflicting Issues of Oversight (Mid-20th Century - Present Day)

Educational enrollment increased significantly as the baby-boomer generation entered American schools in the 1950s, prompting a White House Conference on Education to commission a national study on the goals of public education. One outcome of this study was that increased

funding would be required to support such important and comprehensive educational efforts, but also that "accountability should be enforced by denying schools that do not use money wisely" (p. 26). While the wise use of money was, and continues to be, problematized by the continuance of multiple and conflicting agendas for what should be considered an adequate outcome of an American education, the desire to hold schools accountable for outcomes was not in question. As a result, various initiatives, such as the test-based accountability plans developed in 2001 as part of the No Child Left Behind legislation (p. 53), attempted to provide standards-based benchmarks against which to judge the effectiveness of a school. Despite the numerous studies that exist regarding the challenges, or flaws, of NCLB, the reporting of proficiency outcomes remains a regular fixture in the American educational system for gauging the effectiveness of schools, teachers, etc. One of the major flaws, as argued by Rothstein et al. (2008) was that proficiency measures relying on standardized testing, while inexpensive and manageable for mass usage, are overly myopic. This type of accountability system does not provide the space to assess students against the "non-cognitive qualities" (p. 5) such as those highlighted by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning.